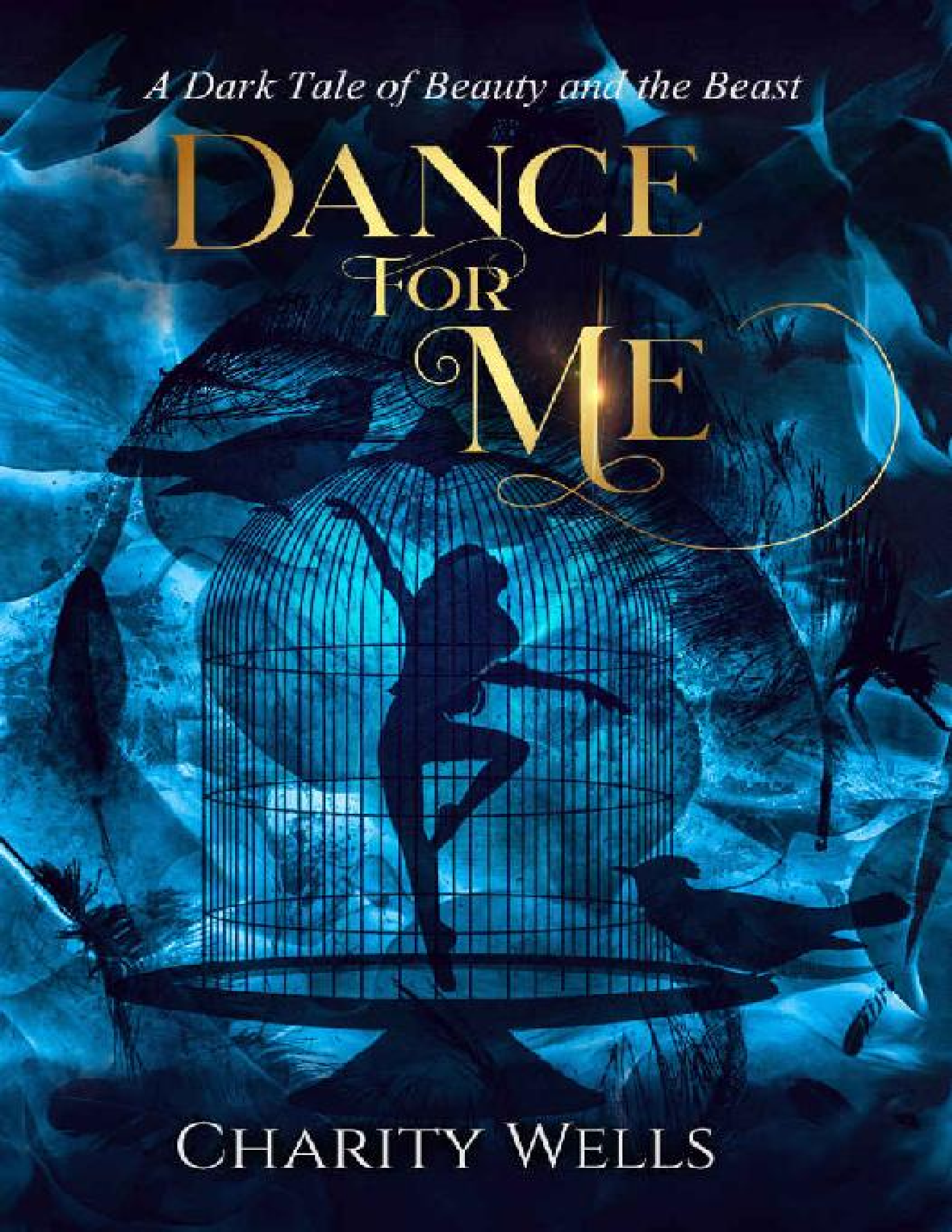
A Dark Tale of Beauty and the Beast

DANCE FOR ME



CHARITY WELLS

Dance for Me

A Dark Tale of Beauty and the Beast

By Charity Wells

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Dedicated to all the ladies
who want the gentleman in
the streets, but the beast in
the sheets! You know who
you are!

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Chapter 1

Michelle

"I hung up on her! I fucking hung up on my mom! I've never done that! I can't believe I did that! She's going to be so fucking pissed!" I exclaimed, listening to my best friend laugh his ass off.

"Yeah, girl! That's my rebellarina! Finally bucking the maternal reins," he cheered. "So what was it that finally made you stand up for yourself? You've put up with so much of the momster's crap. What was the straw that broke the camel's back?" I cringed, not really wanting to relive that conversation.

"She slept with Gordon," I said in a small voice. Dylan's chuckles cut off abruptly.

"Fat Bastard?" He asked, referring to our overweight, obnoxious theatre director. "Tell me you're not serious…"

"I wish I was. She says she did it to give me a leg up in the auditions. Then, she said I should have done it myself, but he's not attracted to me because I'm too short and curvy. Since I refuse to have surgery to at least reduce the size of my boobs, she has to do all the dirty work," I explained tiredly.

"That's harsh, girl. He doesn't even have the final say in who gets what role. That's Mary's job."

"You have no idea Dylan. If she or anyone else found out, it could ruin what little career I do have! And when I got angry and told her I was leaving? It's like she thinks I'm committing high treason by taking a break without her there to make me practice non-stop," I said, eyeing the narrow trail as I drove.

"Yeah? What'd she say?" Dylan chuckled in my ear.

"She kept demanding to know where I'm going, so she can meet me there and make sure I train. She's so concerned about that blasted audition. Despite what she did, there's no way I'll get that lead but she doesn't see it

that way. So, I refused to tell her anything; I am in ***desperate*** need of this break!" I loved my mom, but she took my life and career to a whole new level of psycho-obsessive helicopter parenting.

"You never know, Tiny Dancer. You could snag the lead one day." His amused, yet affectionate snort warmed my heart. At least someone supported me no matter what, even as far-fetched as it was. My mom drove me crazy sometimes. As a failed dancer herself, she had made it her life's mission to make me a star. I was never good enough.

"Only if the lead role calls for a five foot nothing with the biggest tits in the troupe. I swear I'm not made for professional ballet. Sure, I enjoy it. I get good reviews and all, but I think I almost smacked myself in the face last time I did a grande jete," I said, rolling my eyes. Dylan hooted with laughter on his end of the call.

"Stop! Stop! I do not need to be picturing your tits hitting you in the face, girlfriend," he scolded.

"Like you know anything about tits anyways," I chuckled.

"You forget who the gay best friend is in this relationship, sweetheart. I've helped you fit more bras than a Victoria's Secret," he sassed. I was so lucky to have him as my bestie. I smiled as I thought about our relationship.

We'd been practically inseparable since we met at an audition for multiple openings in Ballet Idaho, the state's premier ballet troupe, eight years ago. He had been twenty-two to my seventeen. Towering over me at six foot five, I'd stared in awe at the handsome older boy. Poor little wide-eyed girl that I was, he'd shocked me by ruffling my hair and telling me to break a leg. The smallest girl in the group, he was the first to call me Tiny Dancer, teased me relentlessly, but affectionately. He protected me from the petty jealousies of the other girls and was, without a doubt, the greatest adoptive big brother a girl could have.

Of course, he had to go and break my heart first. After that first audition, I'd had the world's biggest crush on him. I thought the sun rose in his smile. Then he introduced me to Roger. Shy, sweet, impossibly geeky Roger. Dylan's fiancé, now husband. My girlish fantasies died an

agonizing death as they erupted in flames of disappointment, embarrassment, and jealousy. It didn't last too long though, Roger was such a nice guy, I couldn't help but love him too. He became my tutor so I could complete my homeschooling and get my diploma. It wasn't long before I felt like I had two big brothers looking after me.

The phone beeped in my ear as another call came in. Pulling it away to check, I sighed at the sight of the familiar number before shunting it to voicemail.

"Ugh, she's calling again," I groaned.

"Girl, put your phone on silent for the rest of the drive. You can call me from the cabin when you get there." Mom's latest fanatical behavior had finally become too much and I snapped. Throwing some things in a bag, I'd called up Dylan and accepted his offer of a private retreat to his dad's mostly unused hunting cabin, located in a very sparsely habited area on the edge of the Rocky Mountains.

"Alright, I'll call you later. Give Roger a hug for me."

"Baby you know I'll do more than just hug him," he replied cheekily. I could practically hear the impudent grin on his face.

"TMI! TMI!" I laughed, hanging up on his crow of mirth and tossing the phone on the passenger seat. It bounced and fell down the far side of the passenger seat by the door. "Fuck!" Cursing angrily as my mother's ringtone started going off almost immediately, I blew out a gusty sigh of frustration. *Hopefully I'll lose my cell signal soon,* I prayed as the stupid thing rang over and over.

Here I was, avoiding my tyrant of a mother for a scant week. I still planned to practice of course, just without her voice resounding in my ears. The phone continued to peal, giving a voicemail chime in between each bout of rings. Was a week really long enough away? Concentrating on the drive, I studiously ignored the jingly tune it played. When it finally fell silent, I breathed a sigh of relief.

Maybe that email from the Oklahoma Ballet was worth considering?

I took my time on the twisty mountain road, watching for the landmarks Dylan had mapped out. Supposedly the cabin was only a couple

hours away, but I felt like I'd been driving forever.

The murky sky had been threatening rain for most of my drive. The thick, heavy clouds suddenly opened up and dumped a deluge of water on me, obscuring the road and forcing me to slow down. My wipers worked overtime as I squinted through the downpour. I thought I was close, but I was having trouble reading the few signs I could see.

Finally spotting a landmark that matched Dylan's directions, I slowed further. There was a turn here somewhere. A flash of lightning highlighted a very narrow break in the trees and an overgrown road. I eased my car through it. It was tight and deeply rutted in places. Tree limbs thrashed in the wind, scratching along the car doors and slapping at the windows.

Dylan had said the road would be a little overgrown since his dad hadn't gone hunting in a few years, but this was ridiculous! The wipers were next to useless as I crept along.

"Dylan, if I survive this vacation, I swear I'm going to kill you," I muttered under my breath, wincing at a particularly loud, aggressive peal of thunder.

Lightning cracked, blinding me with its flash. Something small pinged against my hood. Then a crack, loud enough to hear over the storm. The nose of the car disappeared in the branches of a tree and I shrieked, shielding my face instinctually as the glass burst inwards. The engine whined from the strain of the impact. Rain poured through the hole in the windshield, soaking me instantly.

Taking a steadying breath, I threw the car in park and climbed out to survey the damage. From the looks of it, lightning had struck a nearby tree. Splinters exploded everywhere as the tree split in two, crashing to the ground in front of me. Its branches had slammed into the windshield, spiderwebbing the safety glass as it shattered. One limb had torn through the broken glass, ripping it down the middle, before catching on the frame. There were a few dents on the hood, but it didn't look too bad. Thank God it was paid off. Maybe I'd just get the windshield fixed and not worry about the body. I didn't see the point in wasting money on unnecessary repairs.

There was no way to go forward and no way to turn around. I had no choice but to try to back up. The spaces between the trees were pitch black and the rain destroyed what little visibility there could have been. Carefully, I backed out of the fallen tree, the branch grinding against the metal as it dragged across the frame on its way out. Reversing slowly, I spotted a gap in the trees that looked wide enough to back into. Mentally crossing my fingers, I turned the wheel and steered into it.

Squinting as I struggled to see through the rain that lashed at me, I eased between the trees. Just as my rear tires passed through the trunks, my back end dropped. The bottom of the car caught on the edge of whatever drop-off was hiding in the dark. My tires spun wildly, finding no traction on the open-air underneath. The trees were too close for me to open my door and get out. Instead, I hung there wondering what I was going to do now. The rain poured down harder. Another jolt underneath me and I squeaked, heart racing in dread. Petrified, I watched the trees slide slowly passed as the car slipped further over the edge.

The bulk of the car's weight eased over the lip and gravity took over. Uselessly I pumped the brakes, desperate to stop before it was too late. A slow slither on mud turned into a brutal careening rush down the mountain. Panicking, I screamed as my car bounced violently over fallen trees and half buried boulders. There was a loud bang. Something slapped me in the face and my skin burned. My side windows shattered, spraying glass into the vehicle.

Finally, the car slammed into something big enough to stop it. My head snapped back against the headrest and everything went black from the sudden stop. I blinked, trying to clear my vision as I attempted to gather my wits. Everything hurt and my ears rang loudly. Rain still poured in through the broken windows. Nonstop blaring from the horn filled the car, the sound pounding in my head. I was chilled and starting to shake. I ached all over, my body protesting every little movement.

Somehow, I unbuckled and managed to push the door open despite the car being oddly canted and partially raised into the air. Sliding out, I landed in a heap on the ground when my legs didn't want to hold me up. Throbbing in my head made it hard to focus on my surroundings, the

world spun like a top. I dragged myself up the side of the car and straightened to stand, legs shaking and weak.

A wolf's howl echoed in the storm, just barely audible over the sound of the horn. I turned quickly, trying to track the sound. My head spun with the sudden movement. A burst of white behind my eyes and my blood roaring in my ears were my only warning. The light faded to black and I crumpled into the mud. Then, there was nothing.

Chapter 2

Monster

The birds were restless. Storms always made them nervous and this one was a doozy. Carefully I draped covers over the cages closest to the open balcony. Today was one of my better days and I had to make sure they stayed warm and safe while my mind was clear. I couldn't lose any of them.

A discordant blaring noise filtered in from the broken balcony doors, causing my sensitive ears to flick towards the sound. Shuffling out into the rain, I squinted in the direction it came from. Just barely visible in the deluge of rain, the bright twin beams of a pair of headlights shone through the trees.

A crash? No one had ever crashed in my valley. What were they doing here? What the hell was someone doing out in this storm anyways? One of my sentries howled. An intruder. Someone survived the crash it seemed. Vaulting over the railing, I leaped the ten feet to the ground. Grunting at the impact, I loped towards the wreck on all fours. In some ways, running like this was easier than running upright, but it was still jarring and painful.

It took only a few minutes to reach the battered vehicle, its horn loud and disturbing to me. It had slid backwards down the steep incline. Gouges down the sides and raw places where the side mirrors had ripped off, evidence of multiple collisions with the trees as it scraped its way to the bottom. The deployed airbags shown bright white in the storm's gloom. Cautiously, I circled the site, staying deep in the shadows. There was no movement. Where was the survivor?

A muddy pile of blue next to the open driver side door caught my eye. Easing towards it, I spotted a tiny pale hand lying in the muck, water pooling in the palm. Slowly, I crept forward until I stood over the small figure in the puddle. Gently, I rolled the body over. It was a girl. She was messy, covered in mud, and bleeding from cuts on her arms and face. In the dark it was hard to tell much of anything else about her.

She moaned, shuddering in the cold rain. Alive after all, I thought sniffing her. I liked how she smelled. Crouching, I gently slid my arms under her body and picked her up. A small cry of pain escaped her, but she didn't awaken. As quickly as I was able, I carried her back to my home. My collection always had room for more, and this one would actually be able to talk to me.

I considered what to do with the little human in my arms. She was dainty and light. I'd feel like I was carrying a child if it weren't for the generous curves I felt under her baby blue top. Long ebony hair hung in ragged wet locks from her head. Tiny delicate hands curled against her chest as she lay in my arms.

Knowing she needed care, I chose to take her to my room. It wasn't clean by any means, but the bed was dry and warm, something she needed. Her little frame was wracked with shivers by the time I reached the house. I paused at the bottom of the stairs. Stairs on two legs was very difficult with my twisted frame. Sighing I draped her over my shoulder and hobbled up the stairs on three limbs. She groaned at the jostling but was otherwise quiet.

Finally reaching the room, I quickly stripped the wet clothes from her body by slicing the fabric open with my claws. I used some of the wet material to wipe most of the mud and blood from her face and limbs. Her skin was smooth and lightly tanned. The absence of tan lines and chemical scent told me it was either genetic or the product of nude sunbathing. She had large firm breasts with dark rosy nipples that pebbled in the cool air. I tried to ignore them. Her limbs were long and athletic, despite her small stature. Crinkly black pubic hair hid her sex, but not her scent. Under the ugly tang of the blood and the earthier mud scent, she smelled clean and sweet, a feminine musk clinging to her skin. It was soothing to my hypersensitive and unstable senses.

My cock was semi hard by the time I tucked her into the bed. She whimpered softly, shivering. The car's horn still blared into the night. Cursing I returned to the crash site and irritably tore the wiring free of the engine. Two of my wolves still searched the woods for signs of other

people. A small suitcase spilled across the backseat and I decided to leave it. She wouldn't need it.

When I returned to the room, I found her still unconscious and cold to the touch. She needed warmth before she became hypothermic and died. There was no fire and no supplies to make one. I didn't need one with my coat. Shaking the rain from my fur. I dried myself as much as possible. Not unwillingly, I slid into the bed and pulled her into my arms. Awkwardly, I tucked her against my misshapen form as best I could. Soon her shivers stopped and she sighed, breathing easier. She shifted closer to my warmth, her ass unerringly settling against my cock, which hardened in anticipation.

I couldn't remember the last time I'd held a female in my arms, just that it was a familiar and welcome sensation. I snuffled her hair, drawing more of her scent into my lungs, tasting it on my tongue. She couldn't leave the valley now. She was mine, I decided, an end to my never-ending isolation. I wouldn't be so alone anymore. I wanted her. Pulling her tighter, I drifted a hand over her body learning the feel of her skin and curves. She really was beautiful, and so very soft. For the first time in a long time, I wasn't thinking about my pain as I drifted off to sleep with this prize in my arms.

Chapter 3

Michelle

Something tickled my nose. Swiping at it irritably, I shifted, burrowing into the warmth that surrounded me. There was a prickle of fur against my skin. Groggily, I fought off the sleepy fog in my head. The surface under me shifted and the bulk of the warmth disappeared, leaving only lingering heat. Startled, I sat up clutching the blankets to my nudity. The room was pitch dark and the air smelled kind of funky; like wet dog and filth. There was a heavy, prickly feeling to the darkness, like I was being watched.

"Hello?" I said nervously. "Is anyone there? Where am I?" Silence filled the room. My eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness and I could almost pick out the shapes of furniture, but nothing familiar. My body ached, head throbbing. The crash came back to me. Someone must have found me and brought me here, but where was here? Why was I naked? Quietly, I eased my feet over the side of the bed.

"Stay in the bed," a rough voice growled from the darkness. I shrieked in surprise.

"Who's there?" I demanded, holding the sheets tighter to me.

"Your savior," the voice rumbled mockingly. His tone suggested he was anything but.

"I appreciate your help," I replied cautiously. "Do you have a phone I can use to call for a ride?"

"No," he said bluntly.

"I had a suitcase in my car," I started.

"I know," he interrupted.

"Can I get it?"

"No," his reply was curt.

"I need my clothes," I insisted.

“You need only what I wish to give you, and I rather like seeing you naked in my bed,” he stated roughly. I gasped in shock.

“How dare you!” I exclaimed angrily. “I won’t stand for this! I want my things! I am leaving!” I started to stand, pulling the blanket around me like a shield.

A heavy body collided with me, shoving me back on the bed. Coarse, shaggy hair covered every part of whatever it was that touched me and I recoiled in fear. Calloused, strangely shaped hands gripped my arms as the large form settled its weight on me. The shadow above me was twisted and unrecognizable. The misshapen silhouette of his head leaned down until it was level with my ear and I felt the unmistakable scrape of sharp teeth brush against my cheek.

“Do not mistake my generosity for weakness, little one. I brought you here, opened my home, shared my warmth, all to save your fragile little life. It pleases me to keep you. Do not make me change my mind,” he whispered against my skin.

I shuddered in terror. Whatever this thing that held me was, it couldn’t possibly be human and that scared the hell out of me. How was that possible? A long, rough, wet tongue traced a path from my collarbone to my ear and I whimpered in horror at the feel. He chuckled darkly, then his weight was gone.

“Stay in the bed,” he ordered again, voice thick and menacing.

A door closed loudly and silence descended once more. I lay frozen in the same position, sucking in panicked, panting breaths that left me lightheaded. Gradually, as the silence lengthened and my trembling subsided, I started thinking of the need to escape.

Gathering my courage, I calmed my breathing and slowly sat up again. When nothing appeared to shove me down again, I eased my foot over the edge of the bed. The feeling of being watched was gone, but the room still felt oppressive and chilling with the threat of that…thing. Scooting further off the mattress, I reached for the floor. Just before I might have touched the ground, a growl sounded from the bedside. A large, dog shaped shadow rose up and padded over. Quickly pulling my

foot back under the blanket, I shimmied back to the middle of the bed. The animal growled a soft warning, then huffed and flopped in the space of flooring I'd nearly touched.

"So, I'm stuck here huh?" I asked, peeking over the edge at the dark canine.

It grumbled at me and rolled to its back, paws waving in the air as it stretched. Suddenly realizing the room wasn't completely dark, I looked around and spotted a sliver of sky peeking through a set of heavy curtains across the room. The sun was rising and I watched the horizon tun from black to dark purple to rosy pink and yellow as the sun came up over the mountain.

A light snore reached my ears and I glanced down at the dog on the floor. Gasping in surprise, I saw the animal looked more like a shaggy black wolf. Huge fluffy body, huge feet, pointed snout and ears. Still lying on her back, she blinked big blue eyes at the sound I'd made, then groaned irritably at me, before rolling over and hiding her eyes under her tail.

As the room brightened further, I took stock of my surroundings. The bed I sat on centered a large grimy room filled with broken furniture and debris. Windows framed a filthy mattress covered in a small pile of ratty blankets and sheets. The bed's frame that had once been a rustic wood design was now covered in claw marks and broken in numerous places. A busted dresser listed drunkenly in one corner and a pile of broken wood, that might have been a chair at one time, sat in another. The curtains were heavy, moth eaten drapes of ragged fabric that hung crookedly over the balcony doors. Old, yellowing wallpaper peeled at the edges and seams, revealing holes and water damage. Directly across from the bed was a door, that must be how my captor exited, and the fourth wall held an open door through which I spied a disgusting bathroom. My bladder wasn't picky though and informed me of its needs.

Without thinking, I shuffled to the other side of the bed, intent on using the bathroom. A second black wolf-dog stood up, blocking my way with a snarl and bared teeth. The first one hopped up as well. They both eyed me sternly, though the blue-eyed one didn't growl at me like this new one did.

“I need to pee,” I said exasperatedly. “I can go in there and come right back or I can pee here. Which would you prefer? Hmm? Which option do you think he’d prefer?” I must be losing my mind. I was trying to reason with wolves for crying out loud. It’s not like they’d understood a word I said. But the animals shared a speaking look, then the bigger one stood aside with an annoyed snort and jerked its head at the door.

Taking that as permission, I scurried into the bathroom with a blanket wrapped around me like a toga. Quickly using the toilet, I resolutely ignored it’s far from clean condition and discovered that it actually flushed. The lights didn’t work, but running water was better than nothing at least. The bigger wolf barked impatiently.

On my way back to the bed, I glanced out the window as I passed. Tree covered mountains rose up from the sides of the cabin for as far as I could see. Movement in the trees made me pause and I inhaled sharply as a large figure moved awkwardly through the shadows. It was bipedal, tall, and oddly shaped. It walked hunched over on strangely bent legs that carried it further into the shade under the trees. I didn’t see much more than that, but it was black and hairy with a long bushy tail trailing behind.

“What the hell?” I shivered, staring into the morning gloom. The big wolf pushed me away from the window, directing me back to the bed with a grumpy noise. “Wait, I can’t stay in bed the whole day. I want my clothes, I need to get out of here,” I protested. The animal snapped at me threateningly and I jumped back, stumbling into the bed. The other one whined under her breath as I flumped on the edge and pulled my feet up. “What about food?” I asked. “I’m hungry.” The wolf snapped again, growling warningly. “Fine! God damnit!” I cursed, flopping onto my back. The animal snorted decisively then went to sit by the open balcony doors. A cool breeze curled through the room, but didn’t do anything other than remind me I was naked. I lay on the icky mattress and bitched aloud at my lupine audience.

“This is fucking crazy. You know that, right? I’m naked. I’m a prisoner in a grody, falling apart cabin, guarded by giant wolf-dog-whatever-the -hell-you-things-are, and I can’t even look out the window!

Where the hell can I go? I don’t even know where I am! Oh, and did I forget to mention, I’m fucking naked!”

A wet nose nudged my hand and I looked over to see the blue-eyed female watching me with a sad expression. Sighing, I ruffled her ears. At least this one was nice. Whining quietly, she eased up onto the bed to lie next to me, offering a small measure of comfort. Rolling into her, I wrapped an arm around her and buried my face in her soft scruff. Listening to her even breathing in the quiet room, I eventually slipped back into an exhausted sleep.

Chapter 4

Monster

Faded memories about humans told me I would need to feed my new pet more than just meat if I wanted to keep her healthy, so I set out into the woods at dawn. There were plenty of edible plants that grew wild in this valley, most of which could be eaten raw. I didn't know how I knew, and I didn't really care, I just knew and that was fine with me.

Mallow and wax currants grew in profusion along the valley slopes and there was a thicket of blackberries deeper in the woods. Luckily there were still a few berries hidden among the branches. The birds hadn't quite stripped them bare just yet. Not to mention the availability of mushrooms, wild asparagus, plantain leaves, dandelion, and clover. Basket soon filled, I headed back to the cabin. My pack was hunting for fresh meat, but I would need a fire to cook it. For now, she could eat the forage I'd gathered.

If I go to the far end of the valley, I can get a banana for my female. The random thought brought a flash of garish, shiny yellow color to mind. I stopped, shaking the strange image from my head. Where had that come from? There were no bananas in the valley anywhere; there had never been bananas here. Why was I thinking of bananas?

I slowly made my way through the trees, half carrying, half dragging the basket. It was unwieldly and my back and legs ached from the strain. The house was quiet when I reached it, though I wondered why that surprised me. Was I expecting wails of grief, screams of outrage? Why should the quiet be any different now? Shayla stood in the balcony door, watching me with annoyance. She didn't like my new pet, didn't like being ordered to watch it. I knew Shayla's mind better than my own it seemed. For some reason, she was the only one of my pack that I understood so clearly. And right now, she was telling me to dispose of the little female, before the human disrupted my life.

Carrying the basket inside, I used the dingy kitchen sink to rinse a portion of the berries clean, placing them in a bowl I found in one of the cabinets. Very little in the cabin had endured my many tirades over the

years, but every now and then, I'd discover a survivor or two. The contents of the storeroom stood mostly untouched for some reason in fact. Once I fed the girl, I'd see to gathering wood for a fire to cook the meat when it arrived.

Listening at the bedroom door, I heard only steady breathing and nothing else. A quick peek showed the girl sleeping with her arm wrapped around Carol's neck as she snuggled the young animal. My lip curled at the sight, jealousy rearing its ugly head. Carol's eyes opened and she spotted me, cringing at my expression and tainting the air with a tinge of fear. Her position prevented her from moving without waking the human however and she lay there cowering under my glare. I placed the bowl on the bed next to the girl and left before I was tempted to take out my anger on the canine. Closing the door too hard, I heard the startled sound of the human waking abruptly.

Chapter 5

Michelle

I jerked awake at the sound of the door slamming shut. Looking around, I realized the day was half-gone. I'd never slept so late before. Of course, my night had never been so strange before. A car wreck, nightmares in the dark. Now, huge dog guardians, I mean really, there was no way they were wolves. The wreck must have rattled me more than I thought. I was imagining things, I had to be.

The cabin was real, sure, and I was naked so maybe that weird ass conversation last night was mostly real, but the inhuman shape and teeth had to be my imagination running wild in the dark. This was just some backwoods guy who thought he had a new pretty he could keep. He was in for a surprise if he thought I'd just roll over and let him have his way. I'd run naked through the woods if I had to. This ballerina had claws hidden under all the tulle and lace.

Stiffly, I stretched, trying to loosen the muscles in my back and shoulders. The dog that had lain with me slid off the bed, an oddly guilty look in her eyes. A disgusted snort drew my attention back to the bigger animal who rolled its eyes and hiked a leg to scratch an ear.

"No wonder you're such a bitch," I announced, she paused looking at me quizzically. "It's because you really are a bitch." It was a stupid, snarky comment, but the dog curled her lip at me and directed her attention back to the window, declaring me unworthy of her notice.

"You're not a bitch though," I stated, scratching the smaller female behind the ear.

She gave a quiet sniff and nosed a bowl I hadn't noticed before. It was filled with berries. There were blackberries and then some round red berries I didn't recognize. Picking one up, I sniffed it dubiously. It smelled unfamiliar, but not bad or bitter, just different. The dog watched me curiously. "What do you think?" I asked, holding it out. She ate it without

hesitation. “Alright, I guess I’ll try it, since you say it’s ok,” I said as she eyed me expectantly.

I tossed the next one in my mouth and bit into it. The tiny red berry burst between my teeth with a pop of tartness. It was good and I was suddenly starving. I finished off the small bowl fairly quickly and headed to the bathroom for some water. The big bitch growled warningly at me, but I flipped her off and kept going.

This time, I caught sight of myself in the mirror. My face was pale where it wasn’t bruised. Raw in some places, powder burns where the airbag had hit me. My lips were swollen and split from the impact. Blood streaked the side of my face, hanging tacky and clumped in my hair, from a minor head wound. A handful of small cuts decorated my face and arms from the broken glass. Mud flakes fell from the knotted mess as well. More bruises decorated my arms and torso, testifying to the beating I’d received in the crash.

“Ugh, I look like hell,” I muttered at my reflection, trying to brush my hair away from my face.

My fingers snagged in the tangles and sticky places, making me grimace in disgust. The shower’s reflection came into focus over my shoulder and I turned, eyeing it speculatively. I needed to know how bad the damage really was. The sink worked, maybe that did too. There was no shower curtain, no towels to speak of, and it was highly doubtful the hot water would work, but my hair was so nasty. Sighing, I fiddled with the knobs, flinching at the icy cascade that poured out and never got any warmer.

“Quick and dirty it is,” I grumbled, dropping my bedsheet. No soap, no shampoo, no towels, no hot water, no clothes, no freedom, the list of nos just kept getting longer and longer.

I ducked under the frigid stream, rinsing my hair and skin as quickly as possible. Teeth chattering, I got out and dug through the bedding for the cleanest looking sheet I could find. I wrapped my hair with the one I’d dropped on the bathroom floor and the cleaner one around my body before burrowing back under the covers. The nicer wolf-dog crawled in beside

me, sharing her body heat. With her help, it didn't take long to warm up again.

Once my shuddering stopped, I climbed out and wrapped myself toga style in the blanket once more. After inspecting my cuts and bruises, I sat on the bed finger combing my hair as it dried. Ignoring the grumpy bitch, I pulled the balcony curtains aside and let the light shine into the room. She had a fit when I reached for the door handles though, snapping at my fingers and snarling. Compromising, I left the doors alone and sat in the sunny pool of warmth that formed in the room.

For lack of anything better to do, I adjusted my wrap and began my usual stretching routine. Starting slow and easy, I worked carefully, stretching out the soreness and kinks in my battered, achy muscles. First, my arms and back, then my legs, each time pushing a little further until I was limbered up enough to bend comfortably.

After I warmed up, I transitioned to basic positions, running through plies and jetes and such. I used the crappy dresser as a barre while I dipped and swept my legs. Stepping out into the empty floor space, I went on pointe and performed a few short turns, arms held just so. Being barefoot made it difficult, so I soon dropped to demi pointe. Prancing about the room, I felt free, allowing my troubling situation to slip away for a bit as I danced. A series of pirouettes followed by a short jete led me back across the room.

Passing near the door, I noticed the bigger wolf had flopped near the balcony doors again and was gazing out the window in obvious boredom, while the smaller female watched with mild interest from the far side of the room. Seizing my chance, I yanked the door open and darted out, pulling it shut behind me. Furious barking erupted from inside. Hurrying down the hall, I dashed down the stairs to the lower level and bolted out the open door.

I stumbled to a halt just outside the cabin. Four more of the big black dogs stood between me and freedom. Growling softly and baring teeth, they stepped forward, pushing me back inside. Frustrated tears pricked at my eyes as I was herded into the shadowy building once more. The largest one snapped its teeth whenever I hesitated. They really did

look like wolves in the sunlight. My hands worried at the sheet I wore as the walls closed in on me. The animals flowed smoothly through the door and surrounded me, trapping me against the wall in front of the staircase.

“Did my little bird think she could fly the coop?” Rasped the same voice from last night. He stood in a doorway across the room, a dark figure in a darker shadow. A shaft of light fell across the floor between us, blinding me further.

“I’m not your little bird! I want to leave,” I cried, voice breaking. He laughed harshly.

“No little girl. There is no leaving this valley. You will stay here, with me,” he growled smugly.

“This is insane!” I replied exasperatedly, he couldn’t possibly keep me here. “And I’m not a little girl!”

“If you wish me to treat you as a woman then perhaps I shall,” he warned. “Perhaps I will do every filthy thing I imagine doing to a woman such as you.”

“You…you stay away from me,” my voice shook slightly as his words battered at my fragile courage.

“Fly back to your room little bird. Fly back and do not attempt to flee from it again,” he ordered harshly, the shadow of his form hunching aggressively. His voice deepened as he spoke, growing harder with displeasure.

“Why are you doing this? Why are you keeping me here?” I cried as the wolves moved in once more, pushing me towards the stairs.

“Because I can,” he answered softly, stepping into the light where I could see him. I gasped in horror as I tried to understand what I was seeing.

He stood slightly hunched, as if his body was too animal to stand upright, but too human to crouch on all fours. Long, patchy black fur covered his skin from the tips of his pointed canine ears to the ends of his malformed toes. A scraggly tail dragged the floor behind him. Almost human eyes glared defiantly from a face that wasn’t quite a mix between

man and beast. His nose was flat and black like a dog's, tipping a wide, blunted snout over a long jaw. Crooked fangs peeked out of lips that weren't human at all. His torso was humanoid in shape, but his legs crooked backwards like a dog's, ankles raised off the ground so that he balanced only on the balls of his feet and toes. His hands were long fingered and tipped in wicked looking claws. He was technically naked, but thankfully, thick fur covered his groin and hid his genitals.

As I stared wide eyed at the monstrous form in front of me, I heard the distinctive plop of liquid hitting the ground. Looking down, I saw puddles of red forming at his sides. In horror, I realized there was blood dripping from his claws. He glanced at his hands, following my gaze and snickered darkly.

"You'll have to excuse the mess; I was in the middle of preparing your dinner." He swept a hand at the doorway behind him.

Lying on the linoleum just inside the door, in a sunny spot I hadn't noticed before, was the mutilated carcass of a deer. Its eyes were glassy and vacant, staring right at me. I drew in a shuddering breath, unable to look away from the animal's sightless gaze and the ragged, ripped hole in its throat.

"Please. Please let me go," I whispered, appalled at the sight. I could almost see myself in that gruesome puddle. How long until that was me on the floor? Would he kill me before he butchered me? Or would I suffer painfully, before dying at his hands?

In a flash, he crossed the room. His claws closed wetly around my throat, the blood warm and sticky on my skin. With no effort at all he pinned me against the wall. My hands pressed into the fur of his chest, trying desperately to put some distance between us. His grip pushed upwards and I rose to my toes with it.

"I told you earlier, Little Bird. It pleases me to keep you here. You are…quite beautiful and I have had very little of beauty in my life, so when I find it, I like to collect it. I like to keep it close, so I may gaze upon it whenever I like, enjoy it whenever I want," his head dipped and I felt the heat of his breath on my neck, prickling the skin there. He inhaled deeply, trailing his nose along my jaw.

“You are mine now. My pretty new toy. My lovely little birdie. You will not leave me. You will not leave this valley. Accept that and perhaps you may earn some measure of freedom within it. In time perchance, we may even take pleasure in each other’s company. Or I may just take my own pleasure of you,” he stated casually, voice rasping in my ear.

His free hand swept up my side to close possessively over my bare breast, squeezing firmly, and I realized I’d lost my blanket when he grabbed me. I shivered at the scratch of his claws on my skin, the ooze of blood on his fingers. Pushing closer to me, his entire body made contact with mine. Something hard prodded my belly and he flexed his hips, stroking it slowly along my body. It left a smear of wet heat and I gasped in horror as he dragged his erection against me again. I whimpered fearfully as he sniffed again, nose buried in my hair. Rubbing his jaw along the side of my face, he growled softly.

“Please don’t hurt me,” my frightened voice was broken with terror and unshed tears, my knees shook uncontrollably.

“Fly little bird,” he whispered raggedly. “Fly back to your room, before I choose to enjoy your beauty here on the floor. I will join you later, when you’ve had time to consider your new life.” He dropped me abruptly and I scrambled away from him, careening naked up the stairs, blanket forgotten at his feet.

Bursting back into the bedroom, I slammed the door shut and stood with my back against it, breathing heavily and afraid he’d follow me. When no one pushed the door open, I collapsed into a sobbing heap on the floor. The bigger wolf snorted derisively and went back to ignoring me as she stared out the window. The smaller one whined worriedly and pressed her body into my side. Unfortunately, in her attempt to be comforting, the sensation of her fur brushing my skin had phantom claws around my throat and his awful dick stabbing my belly again. I freaked.

“Get away from me!” I screamed, shoving her away and lunging for the bathroom door. I fumbled it shut behind me and lay in the dark room hyperventilating and crying almost hysterically. My lungs hurt as I dragged each breath in too hard and fast only to sob it out harshly and

much too quickly. Tears streamed down my cheeks uncontrolled and I clutched at my shaking body.

Chapter 6

Monster

My ears twitched at the sound of the terrified shriek. Leaving the meat to cook in the fire I'd started outside, I wiped my hands on my pelt before going to investigate. The room was empty, but I could hear the crying girl hiding in the bathroom. Young Carol sat sadly outside the door. Looking up at my entrance, a reproachful glare crossed her face. I snarled a quiet warning. Her head ducked automatically and her ears and tail flattened but she didn't back down. Instead, the normally timid animal placed herself bodily between me and the door. Curling her lip in silent threat, she bared her teeth, hackles fluffed a bit, spiking across her shoulders. Her entire body was a feuding contrast of submission and protective aggression. Shayla growled her own warning, but it was directed at Carol as she came to stand at my side.

"Now, now, we can't have this Carol," I crooned. Her behavior was surprising, but I couldn't have her defying me over a slip of a girl. If she couldn't remember her place in my pack, then I would need to remind her. Her stature hunched defensively at my words though she again refused to submit. Seizing her by the scruff, I dragged her yelping from the room. Slamming the door aggravatedly, I pulled her towards the stairs, intending to throw her outside. Suddenly, the door jerked open behind us and I heard the girl utter a shocked gasp.

"Wh-what are you doing? Leave her alone," she demanded shakily, her original fear put aside in her defense of the omega.

"My omega has forgotten her place, whereas you have yet to learn yours. I am simply reminding her who is in charge," I growled.

"You…you are just a bully. And hurting someone smaller and weaker? That doesn't put you in charge, it just makes you an asshole," she declared, bravely standing up to me.

Her wide blue eyes challenged me to deny it. Snarling, I dropped Carol and turned, slamming my hands into the wall on either side of the

girl's head. How dare she defy me! It was enraging and arousing at the same time. She flinched, dropping her gaze and cringing. Her head turned to the side as my muzzle brushed her cheek.

"And what would you give me in return for allowing the little bitch to stay?" I asked, flicking my tongue out to taste her skin. She shivered, clenching her fists. Leaning back a bit, I eyed the pretty bird trapped under me. She was beautifully bare still, my bloody handprints standing out obscenely from her pretty pale flesh. Her throat worked to swallow, causing the drying edges to crack and flake. I ducked again, smelling her hair as she cringed. The feeling of power over her was as intoxicating as her scent. "What would you give, Little Bird?"

"I'll…I'll promise to stay in the room and not try to run away again. Just let her stay with me. Please," she pleaded sweetly.

Looking down at her again, I reveled in her vulnerability. She lied and I knew it, but hearing her beg for my favor sent a rush of satisfaction through me. Her eyes darted up to meet mine on her last word and she slowly raised her hand to my torso, hesitating briefly before allowing it to rest gently in the fur of my chest. I barely suppressed the shudder of desire that threatened at her warm touch.

"Leave my marks on your body and you can keep her," I growled. "I want to see them when I return." Storming away, I caught sight of her hugging Carol as I turned down the stairwell. The action made me snarl with jealousy. I wanted her to touch me and no other. How dare she give her loyalty to another! Both females flinched at the sound and quickly retreated into the room.

Back outside, I was just in time to turn the meat before it was too badly burned. It was overcooked and would no doubt be tough but that was hardly my fault. I couldn't remember if I'd ever cooked anything before. I remembered the process, sort of, and I knew humans couldn't eat raw meat safely, but had I needed to cook for myself in the past? The distraction upstairs didn't help my already fractured concentration. She was lucky I remembered what I did about humans or I'd be chucking a bloody hunk in her lap to feed her. As an afterthought I threw some wild asparagus on a rock beside the fire to roast in the heat.

Other strange, broken flashes of memory popped in and out of my head. Deep drifts of snow and bitter winds, hungry days and freezing nights, things that reminded me the winters here were hard and cold. Food difficult to come by. Other fragments, telling me I knew how to smoke meat to store for later. I'd check the old smokehouse, see if it was useable, or at least repairable. No electricity meant no freezer, so I'd need to figure out how to dry the extra meat before it went bad. I would need to store food for my female if I wanted to keep her alive. I'd already set my wolves to dragging wood into a pile behind the cabin, stocking up for future needs. I had to make other plans for the coming season. Perhaps I could dig a root cellar as well. Could I remember other ways to preserve food for my new lovely?

By now my legs and back throbbed. Shooting pain stabbed at my knees and ankles. An unrelenting torment of my life, I hated it. I didn't know what caused my pain, just that it was always there, save for the few hours I'd slept with the girl in my arms. Why couldn't I remember why I was always in pain?

With no desire to climb the stairs yet again, I left the food by the fire while I inspected the smokehouse. It wasn't great, but maybe I could make it work. Using a rusty pan, I transferred the coals from the fire to the pit in the smokebox and got it going. Holes in the walls were stuffed with chunks of sod I gouged out of the ground. Then I hung the remnants of the carcass from the two remaining hooks inside and wedged the door shut.

Satisfied with my work, I rinsed my hands and scooped the food onto an old tray I found in the kitchen. Finally, I was able to hobble my way upstairs with the food. It was getting dark now, then sun just barely visible over the horizon.

When I opened the door, the girl looked up sharply from where she sat by the balcony doors, her arm wrapped around Carol and another sheet tucked around her body. Shayla eyed me haughtily from her vigil on the bed, still irritated that I had her guarding my new toy. I set the tray on the mattress.

"Get out," I snapped. Both animals headed for the door, though Carol was slower to leave. I grunted sharply at her, angry that her loyalty

was suddenly so reluctant, and she winced, moving faster for the exit.

"Wait! You…you said she could stay," the girl's voice rose uncertainly, her eyes darted to the door and back as she drew in on herself. Her fear was palpable and surprisingly disconcerting.

"Carol may return in the morning. For now, you will eat and then we will sleep," I growled, balefully eyeing the wrap where it covered the mark on her breast. Hesitantly, she untucked the end of the blanket and let it fall, a blush of embarrassment clashing with the bruises on her face. Some of the mark had flaked off, but enough remained that a rush of possessive pride set my blood pounding in my ears. I felt my cock harden, extruding excitedly from its sheath as I stared. She gasped in shock and looked away, hands gripping at the sheet in her lap, obviously wanting to cover up again.

"Come, eat," I ordered, pushing passed her and out into the cool night air on the balcony, hoping to calm my overheated body. She needed food and I would ensure she got it, but I needed a moment to regain control of myself. I glanced back, only to see her eyeing the food reluctantly. "You will eat willingly or I will force feed you!" I barked. She jumped up and scurried to the bed, pulling her sheet up around herself again. No, she couldn't do that, she couldn't hide herself from me, I thought crossly.

Chapter 7

Michelle

“Uncover! I want to see my mark,” he snarled at me from the balcony. Carefully dropping the sheet, I exposed my breasts again, keeping the sheet tight around my waist as I reached for the food. The beast merely grunted in amusement at my small defiance. I’m sure he wanted the full monty but that was not happening. Not willingly at least.

The thought of food turned my stomach, especially after seeing how he’d been butchering it with his bare hands, but I nibbled at an asparagus so he wouldn’t yell at me again. He stood on the dark balcony watching me eat. The room was thick with shadows now, lit only by the rising moon. Seeing his penis extrude from his groin like a dog’s had been terrifying and nauseating at the same time. I was thankful the light was too poor to see every detail, but it was still sickening.

The meat he’d brought was a large chunk of charred muscle, tough and chewy and much too big to eat on my own. I did eat most of the asparagus, it was bland and slightly bitter, but still more edible than the deer meat. I managed to nibble a hunk off one corner until my jaw felt ready to give out. His menacing red stare never left me as I ate. He shifted minutely when I pushed the rest aside.

“Finished?” His voice was rough and quiet, a harsh noise in the growing darkness.

“Yes,” I answered simply, refusing to look at him as he approached. Taking the meat, he tore it to pieces with his teeth, swallowing it in noisy gulps that nearly had me retching. The tray he tossed on top of the broken dresser after dumping the rest of the asparagus over the railing.

When he returned to the bedside, I hunched defensively, pulling the blanket tighter around my lower body. His hand gripped my chin gently, forcing my head up until I sat straighter. Turning my face to the side, he gazed admiringly at the prints on my neck and breast.

“So very lovely,” he murmured. “If only I could tattoo those on you permanently. Then all the world would see that you are mine.”

“May I wash before I sleep?” I asked, shivering at his territorial declaration.

“Wash?”

“It itches,” I said quietly. He made an understanding sound in his throat.

“I would not want you to be uncomfortable,” he replied thoughtfully, a strange glint in his eye. I relaxed a fraction at the thought of finally washing the blood off, grateful that he was actually allowing me this small concession, and missed the slight tensing of his body. “I’ll help you,” he said, suddenly pushing me down.

Chapter 8

Monster

"What? No!" She yelped when I shoved her to her back. She thrashed wildly, kicking and bucking under me. Her struggles were exciting. There was no more arousing feel than that of dominating a challenging female. Throwing my weight over her thighs, I pinned her hips and lower body to the bed. Catching the wrists of her clawing, slapping hands, I held them over her head with one hand. With the other, I gripped her chin again and held her face still, watching her until she focused on my face again. Those pretty blue eyes were huge and shiny, wild with fear as she continued her useless struggles.

"Shh, Little Bird," I whispered soothingly. "I just need a taste."

She whimpered apprehensively as I turned her head to the side and nuzzled her cheek, pushing my snout into her hair as I breathed in her enticing scent. Slowly, I licked up the length of her delicate neck, tracing the curve with my tongue as I drew out the first stroke. She squirmed and shivered under me. I continued to lick, lapping at her neck, tasting blood and sweat and female as I savored each swipe. She tasted so sweet. My tongue scraped at her skin as I methodically cleaned her neck from her collarbone to her chin.

"Stop, please, please stop," her voice cracked. The sound was lost in a wave of satisfaction as she begged for mercy. I would have her beg for so much more from me.

"Shh," I replied before continuing, nudging her head to the other side. I released my hold on her jaw and skated my hand down her tit to rest on her hip, pulling her against me. She shuddered at the touch. I would make her tremble with need. She would want me as much as I wanted her.

Finishing at her neck, I licked her collarbone again as I shifted down her body. Stopping to gaze at the mark on her breast, I felt another surge of pride as I stared at the dark stain on her body. It was my mark, my claim on her alluring flesh. It mesmerized me, made me almost believe in

whatever higher power had guided her to my valley. Reverently, I stroked the surrounding flesh.

“No, no, no, no, no. Stop it. Don’t touch me anymore. Please don’t, please,” she pleaded tearfully.

Ignoring her pleas, I reveled in the taste of her skin and the warm softness of her body. Nothing she said or did could make me stop, she was so delicious. I wanted to draw this out forever. I laved at her cleavage, dipping my tongue between the globes of soft flesh and enjoying the sensation of her breasts on both sides of my muzzle.

My weight transferred to my elbow as I slipped a hand under her back to hold her closer. Releasing her wrists, I used my free hand to clasp her unmarked breast, kneading the soft flesh with a growl of pleasure. Her hands immediately grabbed at the fur on my head and my ears, pulling and twisting viciously as she tried to force me away.

I snarled at a particularly hard yank, snapping my teeth and holding her tighter, my claws pressed into her hard enough that she froze with a squeak. Another growl against her skin and her hands fell limp to the bedding as she submitted. Carefully working my way around the outer swell of her breast, I saved the very tip for last, like a little sweet after my supper. Her breathing stuttered in short hard pants as she fought her terror.

Finally, I ran my tongue in a hot, wet, slow slide across her nipple. Her body instantly betrayed her, hardening at the sensation. The dusky nub tightened into a rigid pearl and I chuckled knowingly at the sight. She sobbed when I blew a hot breath over the wet skin causing it to break out in goosebumps. A light, musky scent bloomed in the air as I licked her again, provoking an arousal response against her will.

She burst into noisy tears, chest heaving between agonizing sobs. I rose to crouch over her, quietly staring at my fragile female. My keen eyesight allowed me to see very well, even at night. Dainty and colorless in the darkness, she lay beneath me like an offering to the gods. The pale moonlight highlighted her exquisite features. Tears sparkling on her cheeks, her fear and arousal mixed into a potent scent cocktail that made me want to fist my cock and stroke myself until I came on her belly. It made me want to spread her thighs and thrust into the warm wet heat of

her body until she screamed my name in ecstasy. If only she would look at me. But her face stayed stubbornly turned to the wall and her tears fell on the bedding. I didn't like that.

"Shh," I soothed again, gently caressing her cheek. She quieted slightly, but still wouldn't look up as she gulped her breaths into her starving lungs. "Would it be so bad to enjoy what I could give you, little one?" I asked softly. She froze, lying stiff and silent in answer, even her breathing arrested as she waited for me to continue or not. I was surprised when I realized her rejection hurt. Something inside me ached that this pretty female wanted nothing to do with me. Part of me wanted her regardless. I really was a monster.

With a sigh, I shifted to the side. She instantly tried to scramble off the bed. I grabbed her ankle and dragged her squawking and flailing back into the curve of my body. I wrapped an arm around her waist and held her firmly against my chest, my erection digging into the crack of her ass.

"Go to sleep, Little Bird," I ordered, burying my face in her hair once more. She whimpered pitifully, but I selfishly ignored it, and the rigidity of her body, as her warmth spread through my frame and my pain dissipated, allowing me to slip into sleep more easily than I had in a long time.

Chapter 9

Michelle

I lay stiffly as the monster cuddled up to my backside, his dick pressed against me, twitching obscenely. Every so often, a tremor of disgust shivered through me. Eventually, his breathing deepened and he relaxed into sleep, but the second I tried to slip out of the bed, he growled and pulled me into a tighter embrace. I gave up trying to escape and lay there straining to stay awake in case he decided to take his assault any further. Unfortunately, the stress of the day weighed heavily on me and I inevitably passed out.

I woke slowly, curled against a strong, warm chest, thick arms cradling me gently. Opening my eyes, I found myself staring at a handsome stranger with hypnotic green eyes. It was his arms holding me so tenderly. He had thick brown hair that fell in waves around his ears and curled down the back of his neck. He was sexy in that athletic teddy bear way that a running back was sexy; big and fit, but not grossly over-muscled. He was broad shouldered and obviously tall, though it was hard to guess how big he actually was while laying down.

"Who are you?" I asked, pulling out of his arms. With mild, but apparent reluctance, he let me go.

"Don't be afraid, Little Bird," he smiled kindly. "You're safe here. The monster doesn't come to this place."

"Don't call me that," I snapped sharply, shuddering with revulsion as I sat up. If I never heard that nickname again it would be too soon. Looking around, I realized I was still in the same room I'd fallen asleep in, but everything was different. It was clean and bright. The rustic furniture was polished and unblemished. Fluffy blankets and soft pillows covered the bed. This was super weird.

Then I noticed I was altered as well. The bruises on my arms were gone, my hair was smooth and untangled, and I wore a long blue

nightgown that covered me properly and felt warm and silky on my skin. Silky, blue dance slippers covered my feet.

"What's going on? How did I get here?" I demanded.

"You arrived on the wings of a dream, my lovely," he replied with a lazy purr.

"So, I'm dreaming and none of this is real," I muttered unhappily, part of me had been hoping this was reality and not the other. I pulled my legs up and wrapped my arms around my knees, dropping my chin onto them.

"Oh little one, I would make this completely real if I could, but I will say it is realer than you think," he said sympathetically, reaching out to caress my cheek. His hand was warm and soothing. "This place is a dream yes, but so long as we walk it together, it can be as real as you want it to be."

"Dreams aren't real no matter what I want," I replied bitterly.

"Neither are giant talking wolf monsters," he responded lightly with a knowing smirk. Maybe I could imagine this was real, even if only as an escape from the real nightmare.

"Who are you?" I asked again.

"Logan, and you?"

"Michelle," I answered after a small hesitation. What harm was there in telling a dream my name?

"Ah. Michelle," he crooned, then sang the chorus of "Michelle" by The Beatles with a teasing smile and a rakish waggle of his eyebrows. I laughed, feeling lighter for the first time in what felt like forever. His voice was dark and husky as he sang. Its notes tripped down my spine and a delicious hunger shivered through me.

"Are you always so silly?"

"Come back again and see for yourself," he teased.

"Do you know what's happening to me? Or what that monster is? What are those wolves or dog-things he's got guarding me?" Logan's sad

smile returned and he slid off the bed to look out the balcony doors. The clearing beyond looked sunny and well-groomed from what I could see.

"I know only a little about the beast and even less about his hounds. He is a lost soul, haunted by a dark curse. Once human, he has no memory of himself or his humanity. Tormented and twisted by an evil force, he knows very little beyond his day to day existence. His form is a result of his curse, turning him into a creature of lore, something thought long forgotten in the past," Logan explained, his eyes finding mine in the windows reflection.

"Human? What do you mean? Who is he? How the hell do you know all that?" I asked, scooting to the edge of the bed.

"I don't know," he said with a shrug. "I wish I could tell you more, I wish I knew more or even how I knew all that to begin with, but I can't and I don't. There are answers, somewhere. But I cannot leave this place to find them and you are the first real person I've ever seen here. You will have to find the answers on your own. Know this however, as long as I am here, dear one, you will come to no lasting harm. Not while awake and not while dreaming," he stated, turning to face me once more.

"How can you possibly protect me from anything, when you're not even real?" I demanded angrily.

"That too is an answer I do not have, but it is no less true despite how strange it seems." He held out a hand to me. "Come, let us pass the rest of our time together with a more pleasant diversion yes?"

Suspiciously, I placed my hand in his and allowed him to pull me to my feet. Tucking my head under his chin, he wrapped one arm around my back and held my other hand in his. Spinning into a slow dance, he began singing the lyrics to Michelle again, those trailed into the lyrics of another song and then another as he gently guided me about the room.

I drowned in his voice. His heart beat strong and steady against my cheek. Vaguely I noticed that the furniture had disappeared, leaving the room unobstructed for us. The air filled with the soft strains of music, adding harmony to the words he crooned.

I wanted this to be real, I wanted to believe. Escaping the monster couldn't be so easy, could it? I could stay here and never worry about him again. It was a glorious dream, sweet, soothing, and romantic, but all dreams must come to an end.

"How do I come back here? How do I see you again?" I asked looking up at him. He smiled warmly, hugging me close.

"Simply sleep, Tiny Dancer. Close your eyes and you will find me," he said, placing a kiss on the top of my head.

We slowed to a stop and his attention turned to the windows. The sky had darkened significantly. I watched apprehensively as it faded away completely, leaving only black emptiness. The walls shimmered, colors darkening as they too vanished. My dream world was going away.

"No! No, I don't want to go," I cried, clinging to him. It was strange. We'd only just met, he wasn't even real, but I couldn't stand the thought that I was losing him already. I dreaded being alone with that thing again.

"Be strong little one, I'll be here when you get back," he promised wistfully. His knuckles brushed my cheek, a bare whisper of sensation, and I clutched at his hand, trying to hold on to him, but it wasn't enough. My fingers closed on empty air and I watched uselessly as his sad green gaze was the last part of him to disappear.

Chapter 10

Monster

The girl groaned and muttered in her sleep, grabbing at phantom objects and crying when she failed to catch whatever it was she wanted. Standing beside the bed, her nonsensical whimpers drove the hunter in me to crave more. I wanted to hold her down again and lick her skin until my tongue went numb. I wanted to coax that delicious fear arousal scent of hers and fill my nose with it. My body ached for release and I gripped the front of my sheath harshly, hoping the pain would relieve some of the pressure. It didn't. I still wanted to roll her over and bury my cock in her flesh.

Cautiously, I pulled the sheet off her, exposing her body to the morning sun. She grumbled and reached for the cover, pulling it back over her chilled skin, but not before I got a good look at her pretty tan skin and pink nipples. Her bruises were already fading to green and yellow splotches and they stood out starkly against her natural colors. Leaning in, I inhaled, pulling her scent into my nostrils greedily. Closer, and I could run my tongue across her cheek. Lower, and I could drag it over a nipple or even better, her sweet little cunt. I wanted that, wanted her taste in my mouth. I couldn't explain my sudden obsession, but I didn't want to fight it either. I would have her. In time.

Just as I was about to give in to my desire to sample her sweetness, a scratching at the door interrupted me. I pulled back, checking to see if it had awakened my female, but she slept still. The light scratching came again. Opening the door, I scowled as Carol slipped by me, body nearly dragging the ground as she crept in. It was for the best, my female needed sleep, I would allow her this time to rest and heal before I made my demands. My other birds needed care.

Chapter 11

Michelle

I woke with a jerk, cringing at the feel of fur against my bare back. No arms held me though and I carefully rolled over, sighing in relief when I saw it was just the smaller animal he'd called Carol. She watched me with those sad eyes of hers and I leaned over, hugging her tightly, grateful for the little bit of compassion she exuded. She groaned in pleasure as I scratched her ears.

A bowl of blackberries sat on the bed and my belly grumbled, reminding me I hadn't eaten much in the last two days. Scarfing the tart, juicy fruit, I spit the seeds back in the bowl as I went. When I finished, I wrapped the sheet around me again and headed to the bathroom to clean up.

Using a grimy scrap of fabric I found, I scrubbed my neck, shoulder, and breasts, trying to scour the phantom laps of his tongue from my skin. My mind shied away from those memories. That bastard had shown me how helpless I was and I wasn't ready to dwell on that.

The morning sun peeked through the tiny window over the bathtub, highlighting a second door in the other wall. I hadn't seen it before because it was hidden behind a large, dusty, fake plant. I was curious as to what I might find on the other side. Was it a closet or was this a shared bathroom? If I was ever going to escape, I needed to know more about my prison. Maybe there was a window I could slip out of. Pushing the phony fichus out of the way, I twisted the knob. It turned with a creak.

Quietly easing the door open, I peeked warily through the gap. Huge open windows on the eastern wall let in a flood of bright sunlight that blinded me for a moment and had me blinking rapidly to clear my watery vision. A fluttering sound filled the room, drawing my attention away from the windows.

Distracting me from thoughts of escape, cages covered almost all of the floor space, save for a small amount of walking space here and there.

Some of the cages were actual bird cages sitting on chairs and small tables. Others were handmade, cobbled together from pieces of wood, chicken wire, and window screens. Some stretched from the floor to the top of my head. A few were repurposed animal traps that sat on top of other cages.

This room should have been about the same size as the other room, but the sheer number of cages made the space seem impossibly small. It was a macabre collection of birds. Each cage housed one or two birds, some held more. Robins, blue jays, chickadees, blackbirds, even a small owl, all caged in this ridiculously cramped zoo of birds. More species than I'd ever imagined could live in one forest. It felt like an aviary of horror. Other than the occasional flutter of a wing or tail, the birds were unnaturally quiet, sitting apathetically in their prisons. I wandered among them, gawking at the terrible sight.

"I see you found the rest of my collection, Little Bird." I jerked, startled by the rough voice.

Looking up, I spotted the monster on the balcony just outside the room. He was fully exposed in the light this time. It didn't make seeing him any easier. Still bestial and terrifying, his human features were more obvious now. His forehead and eyes stood a stark contrast to the malformed nose and snout underneath. Claws tipped dark hands that were long fingered like a piano player's but hairy on the knuckles and calloused strangely across the pads and palms. More claws on the ends of almost normal toes on feet and legs that twisted backwards in a bestial shape. I shivered nervously as he stepped into the room, skirting around the cages.

"Do you cage everything you see?" I asked bravely, looking at a spotted woodpecker in a corner cage and wondering again at my fate.

"Only beautiful things, things I like," he replied, stalking towards me. "And I like birds. Especially the little ones. My birds are the only bright spot in my miserable, pain filled existence. They calm me on my bad days. Many of my days are bad days," his voice dropped to a husky timbre as he backed me against the woodpecker's cage. "I like when they sing. Will you sing for me, Little Bird?"

“I don’t sing,” I answered tensely, cringing away from him. He made me a cowering ninny, scared the piss out of me, and I hated it. It was easier to be brave when he wasn’t standing over me like this.

“Pity.” The beast leaned into smell my hair once more. “Tell me your name, little bird,” he breathed in my ear. His proximity had the hair standing up on the back of my neck.

“Tell me yours,” I countered shakily, trying to regain some of my waning courage. He chuckled, sniffing lightly at my neck and shoulder.

“If I had a name once, I don’t recall it. Call me whatever you like, Master, Monster, Bastard, Beast, it matters not to me. This conversation is not about me however. I want your name, my pet.” He cupped his huge hand around the back of my head when I tried to slip away from him. “Your name,” he demanded again, growling as he tightened his hold warningly.

“I…it’s Mi... Michelle,” I stuttered uneasily. He stilled, tensing as he towered over me.

“Michelle?” He repeated, sounding almost confused. Then he shook himself and stepped back to look down at me. “Such a pretty name, Little Bird. You look fetching standing amongst the cages. You may visit as much as you like, but do not leave these rooms without my permission.” With that edict he turned, strode to the balcony, and leapt over the railing.

Chapter 12

Monster

A melody played through my mind when she gave her name. A fleeting harmony that teased at my memory, then vanished before I could identify it. It left me off balance and disturbed. I wandered back to the wreckage of her car, intent on poking through its contents while I tried to make sense of the jumble in my head.

Shayla trailed along beside me, grumbling under her breath. She still wanted me to get rid of the human. She was the only one I understood, the only one that communicated with me. The rest of the pack were just there. Sometimes I could read their body language, but Shayla was different. I knew her mind almost as well as my own. I'd never wondered why, I just accepted it. Why though? Why was that? Shouldn't I understand them all? Weren't they all the same?

A part of me could almost remember being something else, but who I'd been or what I'd looked like was lost to me. Over the years, my mind had become more and more clouded. Actual thoughts crowded out by instinct and emotion. The beast in me taking more and more consciousness away from the thinking feeling being. It raged and hated, demanding darkness and violence. Sometimes I woke up in the woods with blood on my tongue and gore in my fur, uncertain of what I'd killed or how long I'd been out.

Now though, the animal seemed quieter around the girl, pensive even. As if he couldn't figure her out, couldn't figure out what it was about her that drew him. In those moments, the being in my head pushed at my memories, showed me things about humans, things I didn't understand. Things I couldn't understand, not yet. Nothing was clear and it frustrated me, angered me.

The only thing that was certain, both parts of me wanted the girl. The desire to hold her down and fuck her was undeniable and my dick ached to sink into her depths, to lose myself in her body. Just that little taste of her skin last night had my mouth watering at the thought of truly

devouring her. I imagined pinning her again and sampling her all over. Envisioned dipping my tongue between her thighs and savoring her essence. I wanted to lick her until she screamed her release, whether she wanted it or not.

Groaning as my cock extruded, I pictured her naked and fighting her arousal before finally surrendering to me. A duality of pornographic images ran through my mind making me grasp my dick and stroke it roughly. In one, she was hot and eager, holding me close as I slid into her welcoming body. In the other, she screamed tearfully as I rutted her from behind like an animal, my teeth gripping her shoulder and my dick pounding into her heat. Part of me was appalled at the thought of forcing her to submit, while the monster in me wanted nothing less.

Helplessly, I squeezed, fisting my cock, stroking harder and harder as I pictured myself claiming the beautiful female in my lair. My balls tightened and I roared my release as I spurted jets of hot cum against the side of her car. Shuddering, I sank to my haunches, panting and trying to catch my breath. Dissatisfaction had me growling under my breath as my dick retreated into my sheath. I wanted the grip of her cunt on my dick, not my own hands.

The early morning breeze was cool as it ruffled across my fur. It was a reminder that winter was coming and I had a female to keep alive now. My pack all had their own coats and could hunt for themselves. They would live or not on their own, I no longer cared, my human would need more care. If I had to feed my pack to her over the winter I would, but it was all a matter of how well prepared I was for the snowy season.

Carelessly, I gathered the scattered contents of the backseat, shoveling items into the case and forcing it shut as best I could. The trunk was jammed, but an odd, niggling sense of familiarity had me checking the backseat once more and I found a lever that folded the seat down, allowing me to awkwardly dig the trunk’s contents out. A second suitcase came out, followed by a battered duffel that held a heavy coat, a coverall, sturdy shoes, and a thick sleeping bag. A winter kit maybe? This far north it was always a good idea to keep one in your car in case you got stranded in the snow. How did I know that?

It took two trips to carry everything back to the cabin and I debated where to store the bags. I didn't want to put them upstairs for her to find. I wanted my female bare and vulnerable as long as possible. She would depend on me for everything now. When she no longer thought of escape, then I would give her gifts to keep her content.

The kitchen was still covered in gummy, stagnant blood from the deer, but the front room was cleanish. Dropping the last bag in the floor, I paused when it popped open on impact, spilling clothes and personal items. Curiosity pricked at me and so I crouched and dug through her things.

Fingering the soft sweaters and silky panties, I pushed things around. Some of it smelled so much like my female, despite having obviously been washed, that I knew which where her favorites. I wanted to roll in her scent. Cover myself with it at the same time I covered her in mine. Blue featured heavily in her color preferences, ranging from pale to bright. Most everything else was black or grey. The warmer items would be useful as the days grew colder; though, it would be a shame to see her covered up.

A roll of black fabric in the bottom of the smaller suitcase turned out to be an old leotard. Hidden inside was a pair of stiff, scruffy black slippers. New, shiny satin ribbons hung from the heels. The soles were well worn but carefully patched. The toes flat, scuffed smooth, and packed with a wedge of tissue that had clearly been molded by the wearer's toes under repeated use.

My foggy memory cleared long enough to identify them as ballet slippers. My sweet, little bird was a dancer. A semblance of a smile twisted my muzzle. A dancer, my tiny dancer. I chuckled at the teasing thought. It made sense. Though short and petite, her limbs were lithe and toned. Strong and well-muscled, she was lean. Her body fit, curving beautifully at the hips and breasts. She had moved so gracefully as she wandered through the bird room.

I wanted to see her dance. Now.

Carrying the shoes upstairs, I pushed the bedroom door open. Again, she sat in the square of sunlight that streamed through the balcony doors.

Still wrapped in her blanket toga as she stared out at the valley, she flinched when I came to stand over her, but otherwise didn't acknowledge me. There was a core of steel under her skin, she just needed to find it. It would be so much fun when she did. Sitting there though, she looked lost and fragile. Carol wisely stayed on the other side of the room. I dropped the shoes in her lap.

"Dance for me," I ordered gruffly, eager for my treat.

"What?" She blurted, her gaze snapping up to mine incredulously.

"Dance for me, Little Bird," I demanded again. My skin itched with impatience.

"Are you insane? Scratch that, I already know the answer to that. No! Forget it! I'm not dancing for you!" She lunged to her feet, angrily kicking the shoes away. Her frame shook almost violently as she faced me. There was that steel. The sight of her wrath was exquisite, even more so than her fear. My cock hardened instantly.

"You will dance for me," I stated sternly, feeling frustrated by her behavior. No one told me no. The pack obeyed without question. She was mine. She was pack now.

"No! No, goddammit, I won't!" Rage built in me at her refusal. It buzzed in my head like the roar of a jet engine. Claws clenching, I growled.

"I saved your life! I shelter you! Brought you in out of the storm! I cleaned your wounds! I feed you! I own you! You are mine and you will dance!" I roared, angrily, towering over her.

Amazingly, she didn't back down. Instead, she stood toe to toe with me, frightened and trembling but defiant. I felt my cock swelling in arousal, the angry little female before me was much more interesting than the terrified one from last night.

"You imprison me! You deny me any dignity by keeping me naked! You assaulted me! You don't own me and I refuse to dance!" Her fury was glorious. Shaking in anger and fear, her fire was a beautiful and infuriating sight to behold. So tiny and fierce, but I wanted to see her dance. The beast wanted to see her dance.

“You will dance!” I snarled, bearing down on her.

She made an exasperated, enraged shriek of sound, then turned and scooped up the shoes. Her arm curved back to throw them off the balcony. Grabbing her wrist, I pulled her away from the opening and into my body, trapping her in my arms. She squirmed and her struggles fed the darkness in me, making me harder.

Chapter 13

Michelle

He yanked me into his twisted, hairy torso and ground his hips against me, digging his erection into my ass. His fingers were hard, claws jabbing into my skin. One hand gripped my hand, holding tightly to those damned shoes. The other clutched across my abdomen, pushing me against his groin. His breath was harsh in my ear. I froze, flashing back to last night.

"You will dance when ***I*** wish it or we will find another way for you to repay my many kindnesses," he growled softly, his sudden change in attitude more frightening than his rage. His snout brushed across my ear as he spoke, teeth catching on the shell. That horrid voice was quiet, almost affectionate sounding as his hand shifted down my stomach to cup my mound through the blanket, where he groped clumsily at me. I shuddered at his meaning.

"Alright, I'll dance," I agreed quietly, going limp in his grip. He buried his nose in my hair, inhaling deeply. Anxiously, I squirmed, trying to pull away. His fingers slid up to my throat and he pulled me flat against his chest, nose trailing along my neck. Bristly fur prickled at my back, making my skin crawl.

"Know this, Little Bird. I know your scent, the taste of your skin, the sound of your heartbeat. There is nowhere you can run, nowhere you can hide, that I cannot find you. The smell of your fear is the sweetest and the race of your pulse, music. I would thoroughly enjoy the chase, but the capture would be supremely satisfying, in every way. At least for me. You are mine, my lovely, no matter how you wish to deny me," he murmured before releasing me abruptly. I stumbled into a mild fall, landing in a sprawl at his feet. He smirked arrogantly.

"I need my leotard," I stated softly, not looking at him as I moved out of his reach.

“No. Just the shoes,” he spat brusquely. I gaped at him. The idea of dancing nude was outrageous. No, absolutely not. I wouldn’t do it. There was no way he could make me.

“Then I won’t dance,” I said adamantly. I drew myself up, ready to fight if needed. “And I don’t care how you threaten me. Tie me down, hit me, rape me. You’ve taken enough from me already. I won’t dance naked!” My voice quivered just a little.

He snarled and reached for me, claws flashing. I flinched away with a gasp and he froze. Clenching his fists, he snarled again before spinning on his heels and storming to the door.

“You will dance!” He bellowed before slamming the door behind him. It ratted in its frame. Dusty crumbles of sheetrock fell from the ceiling.

“Fucking asshole!” I screamed through the door in a flash of reckless defiance. “Big ugly bully thinks he can push me around, he’s got another thing coming,” I blustered quietly as I fumed, hugging myself with a worried shiver.

How far would my bravado take me? How much trouble would it cause me? I was a professional ballet dancer, not some girl in a porno shaking her tits. How dare he think he could order me to dance nude! I needed to get out of here, before the worst happened.

The sound of growling and snarls filtered through the door, followed by the thud of something being thrown. My ‘host’ was apparently throwing a tantrum downstairs. Glass broke; something crashed against a wall. A door slammed. Listening to the racket made me nervous. He was royally pissed. Would he follow through on his threats? So far, all he’d done was act like an ass and go out of his way to intimidate me.

Even the licking hadn’t gone as far as he’d obviously wanted it to. I shuddered at that memory. If he’d been a guy I liked, I might have enjoyed it, I liked a little dominance play once in a while, but he wasn’t someone I was attracted to. He wasn’t even human. He was a bully and a monster who liked to cage things. The only positive was that he hadn’t actually hurt me.

Not yet. I was worried I might have pushed my luck too far this time though.

Thinking about cages reminded me of the birds in the other room. Some of them had looked pretty bad. Several had been very quiet and still, dull feathers hanging off of tired, pitiful bodies. The seed eaters looked almost okay, but there was no way he was gathering enough bugs to feed the insectivores. He might like his birds, but he evidently wasn't able to care for them properly. They needed to be released.

I'd spent most of the morning wondering if I had the guts to free them. I was stuck here, but they could fly away. Another crash downstairs made me flinch and eye the door suspiciously. As much as I wanted to do something, waiting was probably a better idea. He was already pissed off, what would he do if I released his precious collection?

Carol came over and leaned on my leg, whining anxiously. Having her nearby was comforting. At least something in this hellhole was being nice to me. I scratched her ruff as we listened to the noise, flinching at the loudest crashes. The big bitchy one had, thankfully, not come back with Carol this morning, so that was a plus. There was something wrong with that one and I didn't want her around.

The din quieted and heavy steps tromped up the stairs. Not good. Dread hung heavy in my belly. I just knew he was coming for me. Standing, I faced the door warily.

Slamming it open, the monster stood in the doorway, glaring at me angrily. He stalked towards me and I panicked. Fleeing to the bathroom, I locked the door with shaking hands. There was a thump and Carol yelped loudly. Leaving her behind like that had been cowardly. Despite how badly I betrayed her though, I was too scared to face him when he looked that furious. The knob jiggled violently but didn't turn.

"Come out, come out, Little Bird," he crooned through the door. Claws scratched softly against the wood. "Come out and dance." His voice was different, there was a sing song of malicious glee in it that left me shaking and terrified.

“No,” I stammered tremulously, smothering the somewhat psychotic urge to giggle as I suddenly realized how the three little pigs must have felt. I backed towards the door to the other room. Maybe I could go over the balcony like he had? How far to the ground was it? Could I get down without breaking something?

An ugly growl halted my retreat and I whirled to face the source. The mean female stood in the doorway. A second monster poised to attack. Her head was down as she bared her teeth, hackles raised. Ropes of drool hung from her fangs and she stared at me with scary red eyes. The beast pounded on the door again.

“Open this door!” He yelled, the door shaking under his fist. The bitch stepped into the room, ready to pounce. Backing away from both threats, I found myself cornered in the tub. The locked door buckled, bursting open under the beast’s weight and slamming into the wall.

In the split second that I stared at the now broken door, the wolf dog had disappeared and the door to the bird room was mysteriously closed. The wolf-man closed the distance between us and snatched me out of the tub. He trembled with rage, eyes glowing murderously.

“You won’t sing! You won’t dance! You won’t fuck! But you want a locked door between us? So be it,” he snarled, shaking me angrily. Dragging me by the arm, he pulled me out of the bathroom. Poor Carol was shaking her head dazedly from where she’d apparently been thrown into the wall. I tripped, nearly falling down the stairs as we went, but the bruising grip on my arm kept me upright. A door opened into a dark room at the bottom of the stairs. Shoving me through it, he slammed the door shut, blocking out the only source of light.

I stumbled over something as the light cut out, landing on my knees and my vision failed me. The click of the lock was like a gunshot in my ears. Groping my way back to the door, I yanked on the knob, already knowing it was futile, but too upset to think clearly. The darkness was suffocating and I could practically hear my own heartbeat thudding in my chest. Pounding on the wood, I screamed angrily.

“Let me out of here, you bastard!” I shouted. A single, hard thud against the door was my answer. The force of it made me jerk backwards.

Silence descended as a wave of shock fell over me and left me shivering.

The room, dark and a little chilly, was some kind of storage room. I fumbled around, feeling boxes and shelves, but it was too dark to look through them for anything useful. When I stumbled across a squishy pile of dusty smelling somethings, I sat down, curling my arms around my legs. After a few minutes of numbness, the weight of my situation crashed down on me and I sobbed once, then again and once I started, I couldn’t stop. Everything was just too much all of a sudden.

Chapter 14

Monster

Damned female! I cursed to myself as I limped through the trees. My bones ached fiercely, throbbing with each movement and flaring along with my temper. I was hunting. I was enraged. I needed to kill and tear and rend something before I touched the girl again. I only wanted her to dance. What was wrong with that? Why wouldn't she dance? She was mine; she would do as I told her to! She had no say!

Shayla paced alongside me, adding her snarls to the chaos in my mind. She agreed with me. The girl was my possession. If I wanted to fuck the little bitch, why shouldn't I? It would feel so good to simply take what I wanted from her. To sate myself on her flesh.

Visions of dragging her from the storeroom filled my head. The broken couch in the front room was just high enough to pin her over and fuck her from behind. I envisioned digging my teeth and claws into her skin as I thrust into her screaming body, breaking her. Blood would well up, sweet on my tongue as I marked her. The resulting scars would tell everyone that she was mine, if she survived.

I stopped short, horror clearing the vision away. A shudder of revulsion wracked me. What was wrong with me? Where did that come from? Was I really that fucked up? What was I turning into that I'd even consider that? Yes, I wanted to fuck the girl. She was beautiful and sexy and warm, but I didn't want to hurt her. I wanted her to want me, to want to stay with me.

Why in God's name would she want that if I forced her? If I scarred her? Breaking her spirit would be unforgivable. Her fire was one of the reasons I was so drawn to her, to snuff it out would destroy us both. I wanted her savagely, but I wanted her to want me in return. Didn't I?

I sat down where I was, not bothering to continue. Absently, I noticed that Shayla was gone. I hadn't seen her slip away. I didn't even know why she'd followed me.

Chaos whirled inside me, twisting my thoughts. When was the last time I had a clear head? Hadn't in I don’t know how long. I sat in the woods listening to the birds in the trees. A breeze ruffled my fur. The birds chirped and twittered in the branches overhead.

Maybe I needed a new bird for my collection? Birds were good. They were soothing. Maybe I could find something for her? Females liked gifts, didn’t they? I would bring her a gift and then she would dance for me.

What kind of gift though? There were flowers scattered throughout the valley. Females liked flowers, right? Or would she like her own bird? I could catch one for her. The trees were full of birds this time of the year. There were also some shiny polished stones in the creek bed. Would she like one of those? Lumbering to my feet, I went in search of a gift for my female.

Eventually, the sun started to set and I returned to the house. Strangely enough, I’d had no luck finding a gift I liked. None of the flowers were pretty enough. Or the stones shiny enough. What birds I could find were all too plain or too hard to catch. Nothing was good enough for my female.

The store room was quiet when I eased the door open to peer inside. She'd found a pile of old drop cloths and blankets to curl up in. Salty tear tracks and puffiness around her eyes told me Little Bird had cried herself to sleep. Confused and conflicted over her distress, I eased onto the makeshift bed behind her and pulled her close. She whimpered, curling into a tighter ball, but didn’t waken. My little bird was a deep sleeper, I chuckled silently. Carefully arranging myself around her, I simply held her until sleep claimed me as well.

Chapter 15

Michelle

I awoke to a gentle rocking motion. Opening my eyes, I found myself cradled in Logan's arms as he walked. He smiled down at me.

"Welcome back, Tiny Dancer," he said cheerfully.

"Where are we?" I asked as he set me on my feet. We were outside this time. I wore a cutesy little summer dress and sandals. The cooling wind was a relief in the heat of the sun and there was a briny tang to it.

"This is the same as before and yet not. It changes here from time to time. Sometimes, I can even pick what it looks like, if my mind is cohesive enough. I picked this for you. Thought maybe you'd like to go somewhere different. Have a little fun," he replied, looking beyond me. I turned and found myself looking down the length of a huge boardwalk.

At the far end, a Ferris wheel rose into the sky. Screams of delight and the clanking of a roller coaster filled the air, along with the alluring scent of corndogs and cotton candy. The ocean rolled across the horizon on the other side of the pier.

"Is that Coney Island?" I asked incredulously, looking at all the people.

"I don't know," he said with a careless shrug, grinning shamelessly. "Come with me, maybe we'll find out," he invited, reaching out to me. Laughing, I took his hand and we ran into the crowds.

Despite the number of people, we found ourselves at the front of every line, never needing to wait for a ride. We ate a little of everything and it tasted so real. Every game was fun and easily beaten. I soon found myself carrying the biggest, softest teddy bear they had. We were waiting in line for the Ferris wheel when it all started to come apart.

A low growl began behind me. Flinching, I started to turn towards it and the edges of the dream world began to crack, darkness seeping in. Logan quickly turned to me, worry in his eyes.

“Stay with me Michelle! Focus on me!” He ordered, grabbing my shoulders and forcing me to look at him.

“Logan, what’s going on?” The growling became louder and more threatening, slashing at my mind. Logan and I were suddenly alone in a deteriorating landscape as the people vanished. He looked scared and it was freaking me out.

“Focus Michelle! Make it stronger, don’t lose this!”

“What’s happening Logan?” I asked fearfully.

“You have to stay with me right now. She’s trying to break our connection. As long as you are here, she can’t hurt you, but if you go back right now, she’ll be waiting. She could get you,” he warned.

“Who is she?”

“I’m not entirely sure. She is a darkness, a madness that gouges at the beast’s sanity and his connection to us all. That’s all I know. She's trying to break the dreamworld. If she does, she could hurt us both.”

“What do we do?” The growls turned to vicious snarls.

“All we can do is focus on this world. Reinforce it. Remember the smells, the sounds, re-strengthen the memory. I told you before, this world is as real as you make it. We do this together. I can give it a shape, but you make it real,” he urged.

“Why is she after us?”

“Not us, you. You are threat to her creation. He's not complete until he gives up his humanity. You are a reminder of all that is good and beautiful in the world. When he focuses on you, he pushes the darkness away. When he does that, I get stronger and I can help push it back, but it is difficult. As the darkness grew stronger over time, I’ve grown weaker. He was so close to giving up. Your presence makes him push it away again. It can’t claim him as long as he wants you,” Logan explained.

“But I don’t want him to want me! I just want him to leave me alone. I want to go home,” I cried. “He’s horrible and he frightens me!”

“I know little one. You don’t have to like him, Tiny Dancer. He's not as bad as he seems, but you don’t have to like him. If you never see more

than the surface that's ok. As long as he wants to possess you, protect you, shelter you, maybe even love you, he can't be completely lost. In time, he may be able to find his way back, to who he was before. In time, you could save him," Logan looked hopeful.

"I don't want to save him!" I snapped angrily. The growling stopped abruptly and the edges of the dream snapped back into place. "He threatens me, terrorizes me. He pinned me down and licked my naked skin even though I said no, begged him to stop. He still forced himself on me! Now he's locked me in the dark!" Logan sighed regretfully.

"Yes, he did. He scared you, made you uncomfortable. It could have ended so much worse. There is darkness in him and it's driving him mad, destroying me, but in the end, he stopped. He still has some good in him. It's hard to find, but it is there. You change him. Something about you calls to his humanity, pulls the feelings that are good and pure out of the shadows and he responds to it. When he does, I regain some of my strength.

"I understand why you want to escape; I just don't know how to help you. I wish I could free you of him somehow; unfortunately, my only power is here in this place. He and I are both victims of his curse, as are you now. We're all trapped in different parts of the same nightmare. Your only chance at escape is to get through to the monster," he said sadly. He looked over my shoulder suddenly. I followed his stare, but saw nothing. "It is safe for you to go now. Be strong Tiny Dancer. Your strength will keep you safe. I'll be here when you return." This time the world faded softly and without the broken edges and darkness from before.

The sound of the door opening woke me and I sat up, groggily pushing my hair out of my face. The monster stood over me, watching quietly. I pulled the sheet tightly around me and his lips curled back in that feral toothy grin of his.

"You look like a scared little rabbit, caught in the hunter's trap. So wary and still, just waiting to see if I'm going to eat you. I could you know. I could eat you right up. I could rip you to pieces and devour you, one bit at a time. Or I could 'eat' you until you're hoarse with ecstasy and

screaming for more. Either option appeals to me on some level. I just don't know which I want more," he mused contemplatively.

"You're a sick bastard," I snarled at him. He shrugged, one short, lopsided lurch of his shaggy shoulder.

"I have my moments I suppose," he agreed. "But I'm not going to eat you. Not yet at least. You're simply too pretty to waste on a single meal and I'd like to hear you beg for the other. I think that would be nice."

"I'm never going to beg you for anything like that. I don't want you touching me ever again," I snapped, shivering with dread and revulsion. "And I won't dance naked. I don't care how long you lock me in here or how you threaten me! I won't do it! I am a classically trained ballet dancer, not some slutty stripper for Christ's sake! I studied at Julliard, God-damnit! I refuse to act out whatever sicko-porn fantasy you have in your head!" I raged at him. He dropped a bundle in my lap, startling me.

"Dress quickly and come outside, Little Bird. You will dance," he ordered gruffly before walking out. I stared incredulously after him. He was unstable and changeable as the wind, but he had at least relented. A little, I grimaced, realizing he'd only given me a thin leotard and the shoes.

Chapter 16

Monster

She snatched up the clothing, clutching it to her breast like she thought I might change my mind. I wasn't sure why I had changed it in giving her the clothes. I might change it again, but now it would be more fun to pin her down and shred those clothes from her body when I wanted to.

My thoughts turned heated as I imagined hooking my claws in her garments and rending them apart. Would she enjoy it as much as I knew I would? My dick ached, trying to extrude, I squeezed my sheath, holding it in. She would more likely cry again and struggle to escape. I didn't like it when she cried. It was hot when she stood up to me, her temper excited and aroused me. The crying was not as much fun, I thought with a frown.

I found a soft grassy place to sit where I could see the door. The grass around the clearing was long and unkempt, but the yard itself was trampled down and clear of long grass. The ground was mostly dirt, dry and dusty on hot days and thick muddy sludge when it rained. For now, it was packed down and neither too dry nor too damp.

It didn't take long for her to appear. She peered cautiously through the door, hesitating like a frightened deer in the brush. Spying me, she froze. My prey drive perked up at the sight and I tensed, almost hoping she would run from me.

Eyes closing, she took a deep bracing breath, steeling her nerves before walking gracefully into the sunlight. The thin leotard clung to her figure, dipping in with the curve of her waist, cupping the undersides of her breasts. Her bare legs looked even longer with the high cut sides shaping along the swell of her ass and the shoe ribbons wrapped around her ankles.

Ignoring me, she posed in the center, still as a statue. One arm curved high over her head, the other crooked a half circle in front of her waist. Head held proudly, she pointed one foot out behind her, toe resting

on the ground. Her eyes closed again as she gathered her thoughts one last time. I sat up eagerly.

Her leg swung out in a slow sweeping motion, body following through the turn. It bent at the knee, raising the foot to align with her knee. She glided across the ground in a twisting, turning, pausing, prancing set of moves that carried her smoothly around the yard. Her arms lifted and lowered, curving around her body as she moved about the clearing.

I was enraptured. Like a swan gliding on the surface of a quiet, moonlit pond, her gracefully serene dancing was a balm, soothing to the raw places in my mind. For the first time since the madness sank its claws into me, I could cage the darkness's cravings. As the desire to take and rend and violate faded, an odd sense of familiarity stole over me.

A melody teased at my memory. A few flitting notes from some long-forgotten time in my past. I recognized something about her dance. Or I thought I did. It itched at me as she danced, almost as if I knew what I was seeing, as if I'd seen it before. But it was wrong, at least, I thought something was wrong.

"Stop!" I ordered abruptly, standing. "What are you doing? Why is it wrong?" Stumbling at my interruption, she eyed me anxiously, arms crossing nervously in front of her body.

"What do you mean by that? I'm dancing, just like you wanted," she replied, looking confused and a little apprehensive at my outburst.

"No, no. I know that. I just…*What* are you doing?" I demanded, shaking my head. It was hard to find the right words. Her expression turned thoughtful as she considered my question.

"It's from The Nutcracker, if that's what you're asking," she said quietly. "With a little improv, since the piece I chose is actually supposed to be a pas de deux, which is a…"

"Dance for two," I interrupted. The Nutcracker was a ballet. One I recognized…somehow.

"Yeah," she concurred with a curious tilt of her head. "How did you know? Do you know The Nutcracker?"

Momentary dizziness hit me, leaving me off balance. Memories flashed through my head like quicksilver. A heavy woman, older, laughing and smiling gaily. Warm cookies and hot chocolate; a fire in the hearth. Shiny, white snow and colored lights that twinkled. It all meant something and yet nothing as the meaning eluded me. Then something snapped into place.

“My mother always refused to decorate until she got to watch the Nutcracker. She’d say it wasn’t Christmas yet,” I blurted distractedly. My female’s posture tensed.

“Your mother? Who was she?” Little Bird asked, studying me curiously. The darkness surged, blanking out the memory. The sweet smiling face suddenly gone. I growled angrily, shaking my head as the flashes vanished. The girl lurched back at the fierce noise and I scowled at her.

“Go back in the house,” I ordered tersely. Dropping to all fours, I loped into the trees, chasing my fractured thoughts. Frustrated, I snarled. I almost had something back. It was almost clear and then I lost it. I needed to think, I needed to find it again. There was still that vague feeling of cookies and holiday sparkle. That was important, the holiday was important…somehow. It was family and connections, but why couldn’t I remember? Why was it so hard to recall?

Again, I found myself drawn to the wrecked car that had brought me that sweet little female. Little Bird’s scent lingered in its interior, slightly muted by the rain and sun that had come through the broken windows, but still detectable. Taking a deep breath, laced with her scent, loosened the tightness in my chest. A sparkle of blue on the floorboard caught my eye. A tiny ballerina in a twinkly blue tutu lay in the broken glass under the edge of the seat. Still attached to the mirror, it had black hair, just like my dancer. It made me smile. She would look good in blue, I thought, picturing my female in the shiny tutu. Slipping the chain off the busted mirror, I squeezed it over my hand to hang off my wrist.

A low chirp of sound had me peering into the darkness under the seat again. Reaching in, I felt around and pulled out a slender black device. It chirped again, displaying a flashing picture of a nearly empty battery.

“Her cell phone,” I murmured, knowledge of the device coming back to me. Carefully swiping the pad of my finger across the screen, I unlocked it. A picture of my female and a tall slender male, hugging happily, took up the screen. Growling at the rival embracing my dancer, I barely stopped myself from destroying the picture and the phone with it. Without thinking, I tapped the icons under the picture and found her contact list.

The upper section was labelled as emergency contacts and held only three names. The topmost number was a man’s name, Dylan. I wondered if he was the male in the picture and who he was to my Little Bird. Dylan’s name was followed by a woman named Deanna with the word mom in parenthesis next to it. The last one was labeled under the name Mary. That name itched.

“Mary,” I read aloud. It sounded familiar but wrong. “Mary?” I repeated. “No. Maria? Marge? Margaret?” My mother’s face snapped into focus, smiling and full of love. Pain seared my bones at the same moment and I dropped to my knees beside the car, grunting harshly and gasping for air as my vision blurred darkly.

Chapter 17

Michelle

He barked an order at me, then disappeared into the woods, running like he was chasing something. Carol shook herself and leaned against my leg. Reaching down, I rubbed her ears.

“Well, that was weird,” I commented, staring at the point he’d disappeared through. She grunted agreement at me. Looking around for the first time, I tried to find a landmark to orient myself by, but I had no idea where I was or which way to go. Could I just walk into the woods and hope to find a road? I turned in the opposite direction the monster had gone, shifting my weight to one foot as I eyed the tree line. Was this my chance?

One of the bigger animals yawned widely, stretched and stood, heading for the door of the cabin. Stopping in the entry, he turned and uttered a short, sharp bark at me. Watching me closely, he waited.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Get my ass inside, right?” I drawled, rolling my eyes. The canine huffed at me in answer. A second dog stood, waiting on me to move.

My thoughts turned to my captor, the beast. I’d barely danced half the routine before he stopped me. His expression had seemed so confused and lost. Then, when he’d had that sudden flashback about his mom, his eyes had done the strangest thing. The creepy red had flashed green around the edges, and not in a ring around the iris either. More like cracks in a broken glass or crazy green lightning. Then the red solidified with a glare of dull light and he lost whatever hint of a memory he’d had. Sighing, I followed Carol inside. Glancing around the front room of the cabin, I spotted a familiar and welcome sight.

“My luggage!” I exclaimed, scurrying over. Quickly snatching out some proper clothes, though some of my underwear seemed to be missing, I dressed in my usual leggings, throwing on a long shirt and a hoody to cover as much skin as I could. Running the brush through my ratty hair, I

braided it out of my face and sighed. I might not be able to leave but I felt a little better now that I had clothes. I felt like a person again.

That thought reminded me of the things Logan had said about the beast being a man afflicted by a curse. There were so many questions. What was the dreamworld? The food had taste; the smells filled the air; the bear was soft. What was it, if not a tangible place? Logan was warm to the touch. He smelled of sweat and man. Was any of it even real? And, if so, who was Logan?

Was he right about the beast? Was there an actual curse? He'd just talked about Christmas and his mom. What had happened to him? What was it like to lose yourself like that? If he did regain his memories, if he learned to be a person again, would he let me go?

A low snarl interrupted my musing. Looking up, I found myself almost nose to snout with the big female from before. She stared at me with a predatory gleam, her lips curled back in an ugly snarl. Hackles fully raised, she slowly ducked her head, body crouching as she stooped to lunge at me. Carol and one of the males carefully wedged their bodies between us, pushing me back, and growled at the aggressive female. Looking mildly surprised, she snorted disgustedly and loped out of the house. I blew out a breath of relief once she was gone.

"Thanks guys," I murmured to the animals. They glanced worriedly at each other, then at me. Their expressions were entirely too human for comfort.

My stomach gurgled, reminding me I hadn't eaten since yesterday, so I decided to explore. The cabin was a decrepit mess. Most of the furniture was broken and only one or two rooms technically livable. Garbage and other debris littered the kitchen and living room areas. The two bedrooms had not been much better.

The puddle of blood left by the deer carcass had congealed into a stinking, gooey, disgusting sludge in the middle of the kitchen floor. Carefully skirting around the smelly mess, I rifled through the cabinets, but with the exception of a handful of cracked dishes, they were as decrepit and empty as the rest of the house. Carol whined for attention and pawed at the storeroom door.

“Something in there maybe?” I asked her. She gave a low woof and pawed the door again.

Thanks to the light coming through the open front entry, I could see several of the boxes and shelves closest to the door. I could also make out more of the boxes in the back. Tucked behind and under the stairs, the storeroom was surprisingly spacious. A lantern and several candles sat on the shelf next to the useless light switch. Quickly lighting one and slipping it into the reflective lantern, I held it up to inspect the room more closely.

“Jackpot!” I exclaimed. Sitting smack in the middle of the shelf across from me was a box labelled Meals-Ready-to-Eat. I dragged it out into the light and ripped it open. The large packages inside didn’t look like anything I’d ever seen before, but they claimed to be various different meals like beef stew and chicken alfredo. Amazingly enough, they were even unexpired. Not for much longer, but I wasn’t complaining.

Picking a package of beef stew, I fought with it for a bit before finally tearing it open. Inside, I found multiple smaller packages with labels that claimed they held the stew, some crackers and peanut butter, a cookie, and a few other sundries like gum, matches, napkins, and what had to be the world’s tiniest bottle of tabasco sauce. Seriously, there were maybe four or five drops of hot sauce in it.

Pocketing everything but the spoon and the stew, I sat in a patch of sunlight and dug into the gloppy stew. It wasn’t great, too mushy and cold to be all that enjoyable, but it was vaguely stew flavored and filling. And hunger was the best spice, or so I’d heard.

Carol lay next to me, a comforting pressure against my leg and I scratched her ears as I ate, staring out into the forest. I’d kind of stopped thinking of her and the others as wolves or even wolfdogs. They didn’t really act like wild animals, more like oversized guard dogs who were friendly once they got used to you. Except for the big bitch, she just might be more wolf than anything else.

Idly, I wondered what breed they were. They were big enough to be part Great Dane, but thick framed, like mastiffs. Their confirmation was more like huskies or German Shepherds though. The biggest male was easily two hundred pounds, which meant they were too big for Labrador

mixes and too heavily muscled for St Bernards. The burly animals had wide, blocky heads with long snouts and rows of big sharp teeth. Large pointed ears stood straight off their skulls and their wiry fur was thick and black on top and silky soft underneath. Oddly enough, Carol seemed fairly clean and free of fleas and ticks.

I ate what I could stomach of the gluey meal, then peeled the package open and laid it flat for Carol to finish off. Then I washed up and started digging through the other boxes in the store room.

Chapter 18

Monster

Once the strange attack of pain passed, I prowled the valley trying to make sense of the jumble in my head. The more I struggled to remember, the harder it was, the more my head hurt. I snarled, lashing out at a nearby tree, slashing the bark with my claws. The odor of tree sap sharpened the air with its piney evergreen fragrance.

Taking a deep breath, I jolted as the smell tumbled my thoughts back into place and everything snapped into focus. I was suddenly awash in memories of Christmas at home, outrageous sweaters, and a blanket of snow outside. The smell of snickerdoodles in the oven. I blinked at the sudden flood of melancholy that came with it.

I remembered another tree, huge and fluffy looking, covered in lights and shiny baubles. Fake snow tipping its decadent branches. Gaily wrapped parcels piled haphazardly underneath it. A fat, cheery woman with warm arms, holding me so close I could hear her heartbeat. A man's voice, laughing and calling her name.

I blinked and found myself back in the valley, alone. This time though, the memory lingered, anchored by the scent of the pine. It didn't crumble and blow away. I remembered her, I remembered my mother, I remembered her name.

"Margaret," I whispered, testing the name on my tongue. An angry screech echoed around me. Spinning, I searched the woods, but saw nothing. A heavy stillness blanketed the air, lending an ominous tension to the forest. The sun was setting, I realized with a start. I'd been wandering the valley for hours now. I needed to feed the girl; she would be hungry.

Back at the cabin, I discovered the smokehouse and its contents had been destroyed. Something had ripped a huge hole through the wall and dragged the meat outside. The entire carcass had been torn to pieces, then shit or pissed on until none of it was salvageable. Everything was ruined. What kind of animal would do that? I could understand it if the meat had

been eaten, but none of it appeared to be missing. It was simply fouled and inedible. The culprit had acted recently too, as the odor was fresh and rank, but it didn't smell like anything I could identify.

Frustrated, I found Danny and ordered him to go hunt a rabbit for my female, then I headed inside to find her. A dim light shining under the store room's door made me pause. I couldn't hear anything, but I quietly pushed the door open to check. A tiny tin lantern, its candle guttering out, sat on a shelf, casting a soft glow around the little room.

Obviously having pillaged the room, the girl had rearranged things to suit herself. Some boxes were pushed to the back of the room, while others had been placed in easy reach. Her suitcases were tucked against the far wall, a blanket draped half over them. A pile of drop cloths and blankets made a nest on the floor where Carol and Little Bird lay sleeping. Close at hand were boxes labeled with big black letters that said MRE, whatever that meant. There were also extra candles, matches, a flashlight and batteries, a water bottle, and a few other things I couldn't quite see, all neatly stacked around the edges of her nest. Carol opened her eyes and watched me warily. I grunted at her and she slid carefully out of the bedding to slink from the room.

I watched her leave, then pulled back the blanket to slide in next to my female. Stopping short, I stared at the girl. When I left her here, she'd been in that barely-there leotard and her slippers. Now she wore a t-shirt and leggings that covered entirely too much skin for my liking. I growled angrily and yanked the covers off her completely. She jerked awake with a gasp, eyes flying up to meet mine.

"Where did you get those?" I questioned. "I didn't give them to you."

"They're mine, I got them out of my luggage," she spat defiantly. "I told you, I am not going to walk around naked just cause you say so."

"I gave you clothes," I growled.

"You gave me a leotard that doesn't cover enough. I usually wear leggings and a loose top with it too. By itself, it's indecent," she argued,

drawing away from me. The movement only irritated me more. It made her feel like prey again.

“Take them off,” I ordered. Her features hardened.

“No,” she replied, a slight tremor in her voice.

“Take. Them. Off,” I demanded.

“I. Said. NO!” She retorted, glaring at me. I reached for her and she yelped, scrambling for the door. The hunter in me reacted.

Chapter 19

Michelle

Snarling, the beast lunged after me. His claws snagged my shirt, ripping into it and jerking me back into his reach. Flipping me onto my back, he shredded the fabric in quick angry movements, yanking it from my body. Straddling my legs, he pinned them down, while gathering my wrists in one hand.

“Get off me, you God-damned son of a bitch!” I shrieked, bucking under his weight. I was pissed this time. I’d been scared before, disoriented, hurting, and hungry. Then, my fear had almost overwhelmed me. Now, it made me angry.

He jerked at my bra, trying to tear it off me and making it dig into my skin. I writhed and kicked, trying to get some kind of leverage to push him off but he was too big. With a growl, he leaned down and bit through the front of my bra, spilling my breasts into the chilly twilight air and scraping hard fangs over my skin. He stilled, staring at the sight of my naked, heaving bosom.

“Such a pretty bird,” he murmured distractedly. He leaned in again and licked my nipple hungrily.

“You’re a bastard! A perverted, fucking animal!” I cursed, spitting at him. His gaze flicked up to my face and he grinned that feral sneer of his.

“I know,” he chuckled darkly. His tongue dragged over my nipple again, wetting the skin from tit to neck. His free hand grasped my other breast, squeezing it tightly enough that I yelped again.

Suddenly my hands were free. Pressing his muzzle into the side of my neck, he pinned me with his upper body and reached between us to tear at my leggings. His erection was extruded and pressed stickily into my belly; his breath panted hot against my shoulder. Shifting his hips higher, I felt his hairy fingers slip under my waist band. The sound of the stretchy fabric ripping under his claws spurred my resolve.

Angrily, I grabbed the ear closest to my face and sank my teeth into it, hard. He reared up with a squeal of pain and I pulled my leg free, ramming my knee into his crotch as hard as I could. With a sharp shriek, his body lurched away from me and he collapsed on his side, cupping his groin and wheezing loudly.

I bolted, grabbing my hoodie off the shelf and shooting out of the cabin. I sprinted passed two of the dogs. They jumped to their feet, startled, but amazingly, didn't try to stop me. Spitting the monster's nasty fur out of my mouth, I ran for the dark woods. If I could just get away!

An angry howl rent the air, answered by the baying of the beast's dogs scattered around the valley. They would be after me now, I thought. Panicking, I ran harder. I was fit, had to be to be a dancer, this was a different kind of exertion though. I was tired, injured, and underfed. Not the best of conditions when fleeing for my life.

My legs ached, my lungs hurt, and my vision went a little swimmy, but I ran. Heavy footsteps thundered, crashing through the underbrush and snapping low hanging branches. Vicious, angry snarls filled the air around me, almost nipping at my back.

A massive dark shape slammed into me, knocking me down. Its momentum carried it over my head as we rolled and I looked up to see the beast tumble across the ground. I lost my hoodie somewhere in the fall, the ground scratched at my bare skin. Surging upwards, he rolled to his feet, crouching on all fours. Turning a rage filled glare at me, he panted heavy noisy breaths, daring me to run again.

A snarl rose behind me and I broke eye contact with the monster in front of me to roll and face the closer threat as the aggressive female prowled up behind me. She growled, snapping her teeth, spraying saliva with each vicious bark. Instinctively, I knew she was more dangerous than the beast at my back.

Fearful, I scrambled backwards on my hands and knees, trying to distance myself from her. She stalked towards me, head ducking as she crouched to pounce. The beast growled threateningly and I froze, unsure of where to go. The she-wolf lunged at me and I curled into a ball, squeezing my eyes shut and tensing for her attack.

A violent thud and a yelp sounded above me and I opened my eyes in time to see her roll across the dirt and smack into a tree. Incredibly, the monster stooped protectively over me, his chest against my back, shielding me from her and growling menacingly. One large, clawed hand planted in the dirt to the side of my head, looking huge and frighteningly sharp up close. The bitch shook her head, slightly dazed, and snarled reproachfully at him before loping furiously away.

I felt when his attention shifted back to me. Claws dug furrows in the soil as his fingers flexed. Tension radiated through his frame, tight as a bow string, tremors shivering across every part of his body where it touched mine. His growls vibrated in his chest, pitched low and dark. A chill of fear raced through me. I shifted lower, trying to break contact with him.

The growl deepened and his teeth clamped down on my shoulder. I yelped at the abrupt pinch but he didn't bite into my skin, he just held me. His pelvis shifted, pressing into my ass, thighs trapping my hips between them. His hands planted flat on the ground on either side of my head. I held myself stiffly in his grasp.

He growled louder, pushing his weight down on me as I trembled fearfully. Shoving harder, he forced me to the ground, driving me to kneel under him. Jaws pinching my shoulder still, he shook his head slightly, jostling me. Scared, I tensed further, pushing back involuntarily, my mind screaming at me to fight back, to run again, to do something no matter how futile. Growling a warning, he shook me again, harder this time. Realizing I had no escape, I whimpered and forced my limbs to go limp.

As soon as I relaxed, he let go of me, his tongue lapped at my neck where he'd gripped me, but he didn't get up. He lay over my back, nuzzling my hair and neck, occasionally swiping the back of my ear with the tip of his tongue. I shivered, tensing again. In response, he immediately grabbed my shoulder once more, growling and shaking me lightly. It wasn't until I went limp again that he would release me and go back to the weird cuddling.

We stayed like that until the woods around us were fully dark and I was too tired and sore to do anything but kneel there. Abruptly, the beast

stood and roughly scooped an arm under my torso, picking me up. Pausing briefly, he grabbed my hoodie off the ground. Feet and arms dangling uncomfortably, he dragged me back to the cabin.

Dumping me back in my little nest, he stood there, wordlessly staring at me, eyeing my bare breasts and torn leggings. I glared balefully back at him. My back ached and my legs throbbed, tingles of fire set the nerves screaming as the circulation returned after being folded under me for so long. Everything hurt, but if he thought he could take my clothes, he was in for another fight. Finally, he dropped the hoodie, turned away, and slammed the door, locking me in again.

Chapter 20

Monster

She scowled defiantly up at me; hands clenched unconsciously in the fabric underneath her. Clinging to it, she waited for me to try to touch her once more. Instead of feeling angry, I was amused. I left her, locking the door behind me. I needed a run. Feeling off balance, I loped out of the clearing and into the forest yet again.

My body still remembered the feel of her under me, perfectly positioned for mounting and rutting, her heat pressed against mine. It would have been so easy to tear the crotch out of her precious clothing and shove my cock into her slit. Forcing her to submit to my domination had felt so good. I was the stronger one, I could take what was mine.

The animal in me had wanted everything, to fully claim the female, drench her in my scent, mark her as mine. But the other me, the one that felt old, but also new and different, had wanted to protect her, keep her safe. I hadn't felt him so strongly in a very long time. I fingered the tiny ballerina still hanging from my wrist.

She did that, she drove me to remember. He was still in there somewhere. I had thought I was all animal by now, but the more time I spent with her, the more the beast wanted to take her, the more the other fought to shield her from the monster inside. The more he fought, the more I remembered. There was nothing truly important though…not yet.

Chapter 21

Michelle

Lively rock music filled my ears. Opening my eyes, I found myself staring up at a bright green canopy of leaves overhead. Logan's face appeared above me, a soft smile curving his lips.

"Hello beautiful," he said gently.

"Where are we this time?" I asked, sitting up. We were on a blanket in the middle of a large grassy courtyard. I'd been lying with my head in his lap. A large oak tree shaded us. Big brick buildings framed the quad around us, people scurried from place to place either on the sidewalks or by crossing the grass. Some carried books in their arms, others had backpacks hanging over their shoulders. A boombox left on a nearby picnic table blasted music across the lawn. "Is this a college?"

"I think I went to school here," Logan stated calmly, peering at the buildings with a curious expression.

"Really?"

"Yeah, I can't really remember what this place is called, but it feels…familiar."

"Want to have a look around? We can see what all there is. Maybe you'll remember some more," I suggested. He smiled broadly at me.

"I'd love to," he said, standing up. Holding out a hand, he easily pulled me to my feet and we walked hand in hand towards the biggest building.

It took a few hours to explore the entire complex, or so it felt. We found a tiny café in the basement of one building and stopped for a cup of coffee. After that we listened in on a philosophy lecture in the auditorium. Then we snuck into the theater and spied on a rehearsal of My Fair Lady, laughing along with the cast as they fumbled through their lines.

Sunset found us perched on the library rooftop, watching the sky as we leaned against the western side of the cupola. Logan held me in his

arms, his chin propped on the top of my head as we took in the glorious riot of color. We'd actually said very little in the time we'd wandered the campus, just savored each other's company and companionship.

"Tell me about yourself," Logan spoke suddenly, breaking the quiet moment.

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything."

"My dad died when I was little. I don't really remember him. It's always been my mom and me for as long as I can recall. She was a dancer before they met, but she was never a lead and I think she thought she could make me into what she never was. From the time I could walk, she had enrolled me in every ballet class in the tri-state area. She dragged me to every audition, every recital, and every school she could bully her way into," I told him with a tired sigh.

"She wants you to be successful," Logan commented unconvincingly.

"My life is an endless parade of practice, auditions, rehearsals, training, and diets. I am never good enough, never graceful enough, never fast enough. It gets worse whenever I have an audition come up. And, every time I fail to snag the lead role, she shouts and pushes me to train harder. And I do, I want her to be proud of me. I'm starting to realize how impossible that might be."

"Maybe she just doesn't know a better way to say she cares?"

"Maybe the real world just sucks. If it's not her, it's him. They're both making me miserable. I don't want to go back," I said quietly. His arms tightened, giving me a brief squeeze.

"I know, but you've done so much good already. The beast is getting better," he answered. I turned to stare disbelievingly at him.

"What are you talking about? He attacked me! Again! He held me down and tried to strip me naked. He groped me, again! Who knows what would have happened if I hadn't fought back!? How have I done any good?

I’m still a prisoner locked in his closet,” I sputtered incredulously. He had the audacity to chuckle at me, eyes crinkling merrily.

“You got to keep your clothes in the end, didn't you? Even after you kicked him in the nuts, he still protected you from the other beast. And he left you alone after,” Logan replied.

“How do you know all that?” I asked.

“I don’t know. There's a connection between us. I’m not sure what it is, but the more you fight him, the more I remember. The more aware I become of the world outside this place,” he answered with a shrug.

“So, you're using me,” I accused, only somewhat serious.

“Hmm, maybe a little,” he grinned, pulling me back into his arms. I settled against him once more with a humph, resting my head on his bicep as the sun set. My eyes drifted shut and I simply felt.

I felt the warmth of Logan's body, the weight of his arms around me, the even cadence of his breathing against my back. Snuggled into the curve of his arm, I almost sneeze when his fur tickled my nose. Wait…fur?

My eyes popped open and I found myself in the dark storage room once more, the beast curled up behind me. Holding me in his sleep, one hairy arm supported my head while the other curved around my waist. I tensed at his intrusion. Grumbling sleepily, he tightened his hold on me, burying his muzzle in my hair. Sighing resentfully, I lay stiffly until I finally fell asleep again.

When next I woke, I was thankfully alone. The door was slightly open and I could see the morning light just outside. Sitting up, I glanced at the spot he’d lain in. It was cool to the touch so obviously he’d been gone for some time. My stomach growled and my bladder quickly added its own complaints so I decided to get up and deal with those issues rather than dwell on the monster that had taken over my life.

Rolling onto my knees before standing, I stopped short at the surprising sight behind me. Both of my suitcases sat exposed against the wall, as if he was saying he knew they were there and was letting me keep them. Beside my pillow, a single wildflower rested on top of the nearest one. An apology perhaps? I was so confused.

Shaking my head, I made my way up the stairs to the bathroom. The cabin was so still and quiet, I easily heard the rustling from the room full of birds on the other side of the bathroom. After washing up, I wandered into the room to look at the birds again.

The poor things were ragged and unhealthy. Some sat listlessly on perches or in the bottoms of their cages. Others flitted about looking for an escape. The unfortunate woodpecker lay limp and lifeless in his cage. Too weak to fight any longer, he'd given up some time in the last few hours.

"Poor little thing," I murmured sadly. Biting my lip, I eyed the cages indecisively. They were all going to die if they stayed in the cages. The only ones that were even mildly active were the seed eaters and they didn't really look so good either. A feeling of determination washed over me and I threw open the nearest cages. As soon as I moved to another set, the birds bolted for the open balcony doors. It took very little time to set them all free.

Once the cages were empty, I started dismantling them. Breaking twine and unbending the wires, I tossed the pieces out the window. Feces and debris covered the floor under the cages. Using a cage tray, I shoveled as much of it over the railing as I could. The most disturbing discovery was what I found underneath.

Hidden under the piles of dirt and droppings were bird bones, lots of bird bones, telling me that countless birds had died in this room. I pushed the piles of garbage over the balcony as best I could, saving some of the skulls for proof. I was trying to heave the last of the cages onto its side when he found me.

"What are you doing?" He bellowed from the doorway. "My collection! My birds! What have you done?"

"I let them go!" I yelled back, trying not to shake with fear at his wrath. He snarled and slammed his fist against the wall. I flinched, glad of the bulky cage between us.

"They were mine!" He shouted, stomping into the room.

"They were dying!" I cried. He stopped short, blinking in confusion. Growling, he shook his head like he was trying to make sense of my

words.

“What?” He finally asked.

“They were dying,” I repeated softly, pointing to the woodpecker's cage still in the corner. Walking over, he peered into it.

“No…no. I…I don't understand. I feed them, give them water. I've had them for years. They’ve always been healthy. I’ve never had one die before.”

“You’re wrong. They weren’t healthy. You’ve had a lot of them die, you just don't remember,” I stated, waving a hand at the pile of bird bones in the middle of the room. He crouched down and ran his claws through the pile, gently scattering the remains.

“I don't understand,” he repeated, turning worried eyes at me. “Why don't I remember?”

“I don't know, Beasty,” I answered honestly. There was so much confusion in his expression, I actually felt kind of sorry for him.

Chapter 22

Beasty

“I don't…I don't understand,” I stammered, staring at the bones on the floor. It didn't make sense. I couldn't remember any of the birds having ever died. They were always just there. I shook my head trying to remember. Little Bird stood near the far wall watching me warily. My head began to pound as I struggled to recall anything about the birds. A low growl started behind me, but I couldn't focus enough to see who was there. I could only see the female in front of me. The girl’s eyes flickered nervously from me to the door and back as the sound increased in volume.

It dug at my thoughts, scratched around in my brain until I couldn't think, couldn't see straight, picking at the dark places in my head. The sound fed into my frustration, confusion, and anger until I snapped. I growled, trying to drown out the buzzing in my skull. Lashing out with a snarl, I swept my hand through the bones, flinging them across the room. Some of them pelted the little human on the other side of the bird cages, making her squeak in alarm.

The sound drew my attention, and the monster in me roared at the sight of prey. He could taste her fear in the air. I roared aloud and bashed the last of the cages out of my way, grabbing for the soft little female. She yelped and bolted for the doors. That was the moment I was hoping for. I pounced, carrying her to the floor. Biting a mouthful of hoodie, I shook my head, jerking her back and forth a bit. She squealed fearfully and scrambled at the floor, trying to find leverage to break free. I bit again, this time grabbing the soft nape of her neck. She froze, her body shaking with tension. I growled, tightening my hold a little and giving her another rough shake. Whimpering, she went limp.

Maintaining my hold on her nape, I scooped my arm under her pelvis, forcing her butt up in the air. I held her like that on her knees, face pressed to the floor while her ass cradled my extruded cock. My beast reveled at the feel of subduing the small female. Her body fit perfectly under mine.

“Get the fuck off me,” she ordered indignantly, body tensing again. She tried to push herself off the ground, but only succeeded in rubbing her butt against my erection. The growling from the door changed pitch again and I looked up to see Shayla there. The rangy female growled loudly, urging me to claim the girl, use her, and finish her. I released Little Bird’s neck long enough to snarl a warning at the bitch, who retreated with an angry bark.

Little Bird squirmed, attempting to get away from me. The added friction only heightened my arousal. Keeping one arm under her hips, the other pressed between her shoulder blades. Claws fisting in her hair with a groan, I stroked against her, grinding my dick between the cheeks of her soft rump. She squawked like an outraged bird and twisted under me.

I thrust harder, grunting as I slapped against her. She screamed profanities at me, ordering me to let go, to get off, calling me a perverted bastard. My beast screamed at me to shred her leggings and take her body for myself, plunge into her velvet cunt and plant my seed. The rest of me was simply focused on how damn good it felt as I rutted over her even though I wasn’t inside her. Sharp little fingernails dug into my thigh and the sudden flare of pain shot through me, tipping me over the edge. I howled, stiffening as spurts of cum shot across her back, soaking into her clothes.

Shuddering pleasantly, I collapsed on top of her, pushing her flat beneath me. She grunted when her air whooshed out of her abruptly. Panting heavily, I nuzzled her neck and shoulder, breathing in the way her scent was now mingled with mine. Her elbow swung back hard, smacking me in the ribs. Wincing, I flinched away from a second swing. She used the change in my weight to shove off the floor, over balancing me even more.

“Get off me, you disgusting freak,” she shrieked, twisting to face me. I suddenly found myself with an armful of spitting, swearing, kicking hellcat. I got scratched, bit, and slapped a few times before I managed to pin her again. This time she lay on her back, her knees splayed around my hips. Resting my weight on her body, I immobilized her wrists over her

head. My groin pressed into the juncture of her legs, the delicious heat of her core calling to me. She glared murderously up at me.

“Keep fighting me, pretty bird,” I cooed encouragingly. “I find it stimulating to subdue you.” I ground a steel hard erection against her genitals.

“You're sick! You’re a sick, twisted, perverted, son of a bitch!” She spat, forcing herself to go limp. I studied her face until she turned her head, refusing to look at me anymore.

“Pity. I quite enjoyed your struggles. Clean up, then you will dance,” I ordered, standing over her. Little Bird’s shocked outrage made me chuckle. “Unless you want to pick up where we left off.” Her mouth snapped shut on whatever defiance she'd wanted to spew. I felt good for once, my beastly side was satisfied at having conquered and marked the feisty female. Contentedly, I limped out of the room and down the stairs.

One of my other males, Eric, was tearing into a rabbit carcass when I walked into the clearing. He had ripped a leg off and was noisily chomping it to pieces. With a growl, I pushed him away and scooped it up for myself. He whined bitterly and I snapped at him, sending him running for the trees. I tore the rest of the rabbit apart with my teeth and gulped it down, licking the blood from my claws. Sitting in the grass once more, I played with the little ballerina now hanging from a black ribbon I’d taken from Little Bird’s bags. I kept it tucked into the tangled fur around my neck.

I was just about to go back in and drag the girl out when she stalked out of the house on her own. Hiding the necklace, I watched as she wasted no time with stretching or indecision, she simply danced. Her movements were sharp and hard and angry; she practically threw herself across the clearing as she twisted and spun. It was dark and beautifully ugly. I hated it. I wanted softness and grace. Elegance, not this embodiment of violence. I lurched to my feet as she passed, grabbing her arm and pulling her to a stop. The girl scowled at me under her lashes.

Chapter 23

Michelle

“I don’t like this dance,” he growled, fingers tight around my arm.

“Tough shit, Beasty. This is what you’re getting,” I snapped. His grip tightened.

“I want something else,” he ordered.

“Fuck off. You’re not getting anything else,” I replied irately. I was beyond angry right now and it made me stupidly brave.

“Give me something else,” Beasty demanded, snarling through his teeth. “Give me something beautiful, like before.”

“Give me a good reason to,” I countered, his eyes narrowed. Yanking my arm free, I barely suppressed a wince at the sharp prick of his claws. Hissing under my breath as they left scratches in my skin, I glared at him, daring him to do something, anything really. His hands clenched like he wanted to grab me again, but he settled for scowling at me.

“I want pretty,” he demanded petulantly.

“No.”

Throwing his head back in an angry roar, he whirled on the balls of his feet and stormed off into the trees. The sounds of breaking limbs and things being thrown filtered through the woods, punctuated by more bellows of rage. I listened to his tantrum for a moment before going back into the cabin.

I hadn’t eaten yet, so I grabbed the leftover cookie bar from yesterday’s MRE and sat in a sunny spot by the front door to nibble at it. It was dry, and not entirely unpleasant, but God what I’d give for a regular piece of fruit, an apple or a banana. This wilderness diet was getting really old.

The woods eventually quieted and I assumed the monster was done with his hissy fit. Movement caught my eye and I looked over to see the big female watching me from just inside the tree line. Her lips curled back

from her fangs as she snarled at me. Two of the males came over and plopped nonchalantly in the grass between the bitch and I. She growled low and then slunk away with a huff.

“I don’t know what her problem is, but I’m glad you guys don’t feel the same way,” I commented out loud. Both animals looked at me with their too human eyes and whined in their chests. “Yeah, she scares me too,” I murmured, scratching the closest wolf-dog behind his ears. At that moment, the beast hobbled back into the clearing. Huffing and puffing like he was out of breath; he made his way to the cabin on three limbs. The fourth was clutched close to his chest. He flashed a jealous glance at me and the dog I was petting, but said nothing. A flash of blue and the frightened chirps issuing from the hand held close to his body drew my attention, filling me with dread. Cursing, I jumped up and blocked the door. Growling, he rose up on two legs to tower over me menacingly.

“Move,” he ordered in a rough, gravelly voice.

“What have you got?” I countered. He frowned at me. “Answer me dammit! What have you done?”

“You refuse to dance pretty for me, so I will find other pretties that make me happy,” he sneered.

“Let it go,” I demanded.

“No. You won’t sing, you won’t fuck, you won’t dance pretty. You took away my collection. I need something beautiful,” he argued almost pitifully, seeming more frustrated and tired than angry now. I sighed heavily.

“Let it go. Please,” I pleaded softly. “You don’t want another one to die do you?” Very carefully, I laid a hand on his arm, ignoring the grainy texture of his dirty fur. Surprise flitted across his face and I saw the cracks of green lightning in his eyes again. Slowly I reached up and pulled at the hand holding the bird. He hmphed grumpily, but finally turned and opened his fingers, releasing a ruffled and unhappy bluebird who flapped madly away. Beasty watched it go, shoulders slumping glumly.

“Come here you great big asshole,” I sighed, tugging on his arm. He snorted at the insult, but allowed me to pull him over to the spot he’d sat

in earlier. Pushing him down, I returned to the center of the bare ground and assumed first position. This time I chose a piece from Swan Lake. It was a sad but beautiful piece.

I kept it simple, but couldn't keep the sadness out of it. I was trading myself, my dancing, to keep the beast happy and the birds safe from his clutches. If I didn't dance, he'd go out and capture more birds to put in his cages. I couldn't let that happen, knowing they would very likely die under his idea of care. So, I danced. And I hated every second of it, but I hid my hate and anger for the sake of the birds. I couldn't escape, but I could protect those defenseless little animals.

When I finished, I looked over and found him asleep under the tree. He lay curled up like a dog, twitching and whimpering lightly as he dreamed.

"Congratulations, you ugly bastard. You just did the one thing my mother never managed to do. You've made me hate dancing," I muttered under my breath. It was barely noon, but I was so mentally and emotionally drained that I retreated to the store room and fell into my blankets. Something came and curled up with me later, but I was too tired to care.

I woke to the late afternoon sun hitting me in the eyes. Stretching, I bumped into another body and turned to see that Carol had snuggled up with me. I wasn't sure if it was more for her comfort or mine, but it was nice having her there.

A bowl of wild berries and a tiny wildflower sat on the floor nearby, a clear sign that Beasty was up and about once more. I thought about going upstairs to finish destroying the last of the cages, but decided I just didn't have the energy. Instead, I took a camping mat outside to do some meditating.

Chapter 24

Beasty

The bird room was unnaturally quiet and empty now. I couldn't remember the last time it had been this way. When had I brought my first bird in here? I just didn't know. As far as I could remember, there had always been birds in this room and none of them had died. But, if that was true, where did all the bones come from?

I stopped counting at thirty-eight skulls, though there were quite a few more. Most were fairly small and delicate, chickadees or sparrows I supposed. A few of the skulls were big enough to be crows, maybe, and I noted at least three skulls with sharply hooked beaks meant for rending flesh. I finally just pitched the whole pile out the window. Did I kill them? I must have, either by neglect or worse. Why couldn't I remember?

Sitting on the filthy floor in the quiet, empty room suddenly became too much. My skin crawled and I felt a shiver run down my spine. My fingers found the charm yet again, rubbing it thoughtfully. I needed company, even if she hated me.

Groaning as I climbed to my feet, I hunched at the pain that kept me from standing fully. My body hurt more and more lately. It became harder to walk upright or even on all fours. The only relief I had was when I held the girl in my arms at night.

Bent and twisted, I limped down the stairs. The door to the storage room still stood open, but she wasn't there any longer. The house was far too quiet and empty for my liking. I started to panic.

"Where are you?" I shouted, running out into the sunlight. I stopped short at the sight of the girl sitting on a mat with her legs spread unbelievably wide and her body leaned over to touch the toes on her left foot as she folded nearly in half.

"Calm down Benji. I'm just doing some yoga. Don't worry I'm not going anywhere. I have no desire to experience a repeat of your disgusting behavior from last night, or this morning."

“What did you call me?” I growled. Amazingly, I knew that name, and I was not amused.

“You heard me, Benji,” she retorted, not looking at me as she stretched to the other side.

“Don’t call me that! I am not a dog!”

“You sure look like a dog, an ugly ass dog. Tell me something, is your objection because Benji is a dog or because he’s cute, and you’re not?”

“You forget who’s in charge here,” I snarled angrily.

“Oh, I haven’t forgotten who’s ‘in charge’ of this shit show. Bully me all you like, you can’t make me respect you…Benji,” she sneered sarcastically, drawing out the syllables of the name.

“Don’t call me that!” I bellowed, advancing on her.

“Alright, alright, jeezus, Cujo. Calm down, before you give yourself an aneurism,” she conceded flippantly, changing position to lay on her back and raising her feet to touch her knees to her nose.

“I said stop calling me…Cujo?” My words trailed off as the new name sparked another memory that distracted me from my tirade. It was familiar, like the first name, but different. Couldn’t remember why though and I wandered away as I tried to focus. The girl sat forgotten on her mat.

“Seriously? You’re ok with Cujo?” She asked incredulously as I walked off. “You do know Cujo dies in the end, right? They killed the rabid fucker,” she called after me. “Is it just me or did the crazy train just completely derail right in front of us?” She wondered aloud. I barely heard Carol’s huff of amusement in response to the girl’s comment.

I had no destination in mind and no real desire to leave the cabin, so I circled through the woods. Every so often I glanced over to see where my little dancer was. At one point, she stood and stretched side to side, arms over her head, the soft skin of her back peeking from under the raised hem of her top. The next time I looked over and the sight of her pert ass in the air made me stumble. I paused, staring at her curves in the tight leggings she wore. She knelt, butt raised enticingly, with her face almost touching

the mat and her arms out in front of her head. I was strongly reminded of how I'd mounted her in my rage this morning. It had felt so good to be on top of her like that. I could only imagine how it would feel to be inside her. Blood rushed to my cock, making it harden and extrude once again.

Groaning, I fisted the aching flesh as I watched my little bird slide forward, butt lowering as she raised her head, curving her body in a backwards arch. The position thrust her breasts forward, tightening the fabric of her shirt over her nipples. Squeezing my dick in time to her slow exhalations, I imagined going back to her and rutting on her again. A low growl filled my ears, scratching at my mind.

No, this time I'd take her. I'd tear those ridiculous black leggings from her body and bury myself in her tight slit. My eyes drifted shut as I pictured myself plowing into her hot depths. I dragged my rough palm up and down my shaft faster and harder as my breathing quickened to harsh panting. My other hand clutched the ornament around my neck.

She would scream and curse me again, fighting as I thrust into her cunt, but I'd hold her neck, just as I did earlier. I would hold her tight enough to taste her blood on my tongue as I possessed her. I shuddered, pausing and shaking the vision of an unwilling girl from my head.

No, no, not that. I opened my eyes and focused on the real girl in front of me, squeezing my trinket until it dug into my palm. I didn't want to hurt her. I didn't want her screaming in pain and rage. I didn't want her blood in my mouth. The growling grew louder, more intense and my vision blurred. I shook my head again. When I could see, I found she'd changed position once more.

Now she lay on her back with her shoulders and arms flat. Her back bowed upwards and her feet were flat so that her pelvis jutted up into the air. The wind shifter, carrying her sweet scent to me. Whimpering, I began to stroke myself yet again, but my mind formed a more pleasant vision of a warm and welcoming dancer. One who pulled me into her arms as I slid into her willing body. She clung to me in her excitement, her moans of ecstasy filling my ears and blocking the horrid growl that set me on edge and made my hackles rise.

Concentrating on the sensation of my fist on my cock and my vision of my sweet female as she took me into her slick, snug pussy, drowned out the last of the growls from my mind. Grunting and shuddering, my breath caught as I thrust into my own hand faster and faster. With a snarl, I stiffened, ejaculating into the dead leaves, and fell to my knees as my seed spurted from me. I shivered, my body fighting to calm the sensations wracking through me.

"God, you're such a pervert," her disgusted voice broke through my lassitude. Eyes opening, I found her standing at the edge of the trees before me. From her expression I could tell she knew I'd been watching and fantasizing about her while I jerked my own flesh.

Something washed over me. Something dark and ugly that I hadn't felt in a very long time. It was shame. I was suddenly ashamed of myself, ashamed of what I'd just done and of what I'd done to her this morning. Then I was angry.

"If you don't like looking at me, then take your ass back inside," I growled. "This is my valley and I will shit, piss, and cum wherever I like." In angry defiance, I started jerking on my dick again as I stared at her breasts and licked my muzzle.

"Ugh, you are so gross," she stated, lip curling in revulsion, before she turned and flounced away. Grabbing her mat, she stormed back into the cabin.

Once she was out of sight, I let go of my cock and allowed it to retract, then tucked the charm back into my fur. Mood soured, I headed deeper into the valley. Wandering for what felt like hours, I found myself drawn to the girl's wrecked car once more, though I couldn't say why.

Movement inside the vehicle caught my attention and I stopped, dropping to all fours. Very slowly I crept around until I could see inside. A wild turkey had climbed into the backseat and was pecking at the leather stitching. The tom was large and heavy, he would make a good meal for my female. Carefully sneaking closer to the stupid bird, I was almost in reach when it spotted me. Panicking, the animal tried to bolt through the far window. Its wings were too big though and it snagged on the frame.

The momentary tangle was all I needed to catch it by a leg and haul it squawking and flapping from the car.

Half carrying, half dragging it by its legs, I hobbled back to the cabin. A large pile of trash outside the door made me pause and, as I stood watching, a broken chair sailed out the opening to join the rest of the debris. A litany of feminine curses accompanied the airborne garbage.

“What are you doing?” I asked, stepping into the cabin. The front room had been stripped of everything but the busted sofa, which was obviously too heavy for one tiny ballerina to move on her own.

“What does it look like I’m doing?” She snapped, attacking the dirty floor with a ratty broom I hadn’t even know was in the cabin. “If I have to be trapped here for the foreseeable future, I am not living in filth!” The turkey chose that moment to add his own complaints to the conversation with an angry cackle and a flutter of wings. She stopped sweeping to actually look at me and the bird. “What the hell is that?”

“Dinner,” I replied, flipping the bird upright, snapping its neck, and ripping the head off so the blood would drain. “Clean it,” I ordered, dropping it at her feet. Her face blanched at the first crack of bone. Now, she stared in horror at the body flopping on the floor, flinging blood as it thrashed uselessly. She turned a sickly shade of green.

“Oh…my…God,” she muttered, before abruptly bolting for the door with a hand over her mouth. She only made it to the far side of the trash pile when she doubled over and vomited into the grass. I watched her, curious about her reaction. She’d eaten meat before, where did she think it came from? Something had to die to feed her.

“Oh my God!” She exclaimed once her heaving stopped. Her eyes were huge and round as she stared disbelievingly at me. “Why the hell did you do that?”

“You would prefer to pluck and cook it alive?” I asked, baffled by her question.

“No! God no! Why did you have to kill it in front of me like that?”

“So, you object to witnessing its death? Fresh kills are always sweeter,” I explained. “You must eat; therefore, it must die.”

“Actually, you didn’t need to kill it at all! There are MREs in the storage room. I can eat those,” she protested.

“No, fresh is better. Save the packaged food for the cold season when the hunting is lean and game hard to find,” I ordered.

“You can’t keep me here forever. I’m not meant to live like this! I’ll freeze to death! Or starve! You have to let me go,” she pleaded.

“No!” I snarled. “Stop asking! Go and clean the bird so I can gut and cook it!” I limped away before she argued further.

Chapter 25

Michelle

I couldn't believe he'd done that. He had broken that poor animal's neck right in front of me! It had been effortless, like breaking a twig. And then he'd just thrown it at me while it still flopped around! Its blood had sprayed across my feet. Just thinking about it nauseated me. Now, he expected me to clean it? Eww. And how?

I was by no means a vegetarian, I liked my protein, a lot. Give me a surf and turf any day, but I liked my food to come precooked at the restaurant or neatly wrapped in cellophane at the grocery store. I didn't want to watch it die! I shuddered as I turned reluctantly towards the cabin.

"Oh, please let the flopping have stopped," I prayed under my breath. Peering around the door, I spotted the bird, now thankfully still, in the middle of the floor, blood pooling around it.

Standing over it for a moment, I held my breath until I was forced to admit it wasn't going to move again or faint, though with my luck, I'd probably fall in the blood. Tentatively picking it up by the feet, I carried the limp carcass outside, trying not to let it drip on me anymore. It was heavy. Beasty had returned to his usual shady spot under the tree, watching me.

"This is disgusting, I'm not doing it," I announced as I walked up.

"Do you want to eat?" He asked.

"I already said, I'll eat the MREs, but I'm not doing this," I stated irritably.

"No and I will take them away if you persist. I have provided my female with fresh meat, you will eat it," he stated gravely.

"But what the hell am I supposed to do with this?" I demanded, dropping the dead animal in the grass.

"I expect you to clean it," he replied with amusement.

“Clean it how? I mean seriously, I have never been in this situation before. When I cook something, or eat out, the meat is already cleaned and prepped for me! I barely clean my own apartment!”

“Just pluck it. Once the feathers are gone, I can finish. Cooking it with the feathers intact will make the meat taste bad,” he answered, chuckling at my discomfort.

“I don’t know how to pluck a turkey!” I cried, internally cringing at my own whining.

“Like this,” he sighed, pulling me down next to him. Taking the bird, he settled it awkwardly between his knees with the neck pointed at his feet. Grabbing a handful of tailfeathers, he pulled, easily yanking them out and leaving a bare spot. Continuing until he’d removed the entire tail, he then held the carcass out for me to take it back.

“I really don’t want to,” I admitted reluctantly. I hesitated to take it.

“You must eat. Therefore, you will pluck it. Now,” he ordered, thrusting the body into my lap. The look he gave me was implacable.

“Ugh,” I groaned, arranging the bird like he’d had it. He showed me again how to hold it. Copying how he’d done it, I grabbed a big handful of feathers and pulled, hard. Nothing gave. I tried again, yanking as hard as I could. Beasty gave a suspicious sounding cough beside me. I glared at him and he covered his muzzle with his hands, eyes shining with mirth. Angrily, I wrenched with all my might. My hand slipped, flying off the bird and popping myself in the face.

“Ouch!” I yelped, rubbing my poor abused nose. Beasty’s suspicious cough turned into a full-blown howl of laughter. Son of a bitch actually fell over; he was laughing so hard. “Yeah, yeah, yeah, that was a riot,” I grumbled irritably. He took one look at my sour expression and cracked up again, slapping his hairy thigh as he hooted with glee. “Alright wiseass, you think it’s so funny, pluck it your own goddamn self,” I said crossly, shoving the corpse off my lap and standing.

“Wait,” he said suddenly, grabbing my elbow. “Please, stay.” He pulled me down again, more gently than any of the other times he’d

touched me. “You are a funny little bird,” he commented, pulling the turkey into his lap again and yanking handfuls of feathers from its hide.

“I’m so glad you think so,” I drawled snidely. His amused snort made me glance at him. More green permeated the red of his iris. This time instead of looking like flashes of lightning across his eyes, it resembled a crackled glaze on porcelain.

“Big hands, big handfuls.” He held up a hand for a moment, wiggling his long fingers. “You have little hands, so little handfuls,” he seemed calm and almost happy as he worked quietly beside me. Some of the tension he typically carried had eased. Very quickly, he had the carcass roughly plucked. Patches of smaller feathers remained.

“Can you finish it?” He asked, calmly holding the bird out. “I have a hard time with the smaller feathers.” For the first time since I’d woken in the cabin, he seemed less beastly and more human. It was weird to suddenly see that maybe Logan was right. Maybe there really was a man lost somewhere under that monstrous exterior.

“Sure,” I sighed, taking it once more. Grabbing smaller portions this time, I worked at stripping the rest of the feathers. Beasty sat watching me for a while. Once he was sure I could handle it, he got up and wandered away. Absentmindedly, I plucked the turkey as clean as I could, only vaguely aware of him roaming around the clearing. At one point, I looked up to see him stacking broken limbs in the firepit.

I was nearly done when the brush rustled behind me. A low growl, just barely audible, brushed the edges of my hearing. Hot, fetid breath wafted across the back of my neck and I froze. Something heavy thumped the ground behind me and a low hissing joined the growl. Sharp teeth raked over the skin of my shoulder, leaving furrows of stinging flesh behind. The growl deepened warningly, then disappeared with another rustle of branches. The hissing stayed, growing louder and more menacing.

The thick body of a snake slid along the back of my hips and around my side. Not daring to move anything but my eyes, I darted a glance at the reptile that slithered into my lap. A cold sweat broke out all over my body at the sight of the wedge-shaped head. I didn’t know a lot about snakes, but I knew enough to recognize one sign of a venomous snake. The animal was

missing most of its rattles, only one segment remained, not enough to make a noise as it vibrated a silent threat. Angry red eyes locked on mine as the heavy viper rose up between my arms, tongue flicking in and out, tasting the fear that hung in the air. Its jaw dropped open in a menacing hiss and it reared back.

Closing my eyes so I wouldn’t see the strike when it bit me, I felt a single hot tear slip out from under my lashes and trail down my cheek.

Chapter 26

Beasty

An odd, tense feeling suddenly permeated the air around me. I stood, abandoning my attempt to start the fire. Slowly, I searched the edged of the clearing for the threat I sensed. The girl still sat where I'd left her, the turkey in her lap. I almost didn't notice anything if not for her unnatural stillness. In the last few days I'd never seen her so still. Not even in her sleep. Even when she was afraid, she'd been in motion, whether it was shivers of fear or a wary darting stare, some part of her had always moved. But now, here, she sat frozen, likely even unblinking. She certainly didn't seem to be breathing.

Stealthily I made my way towards her, creeping cautiously closer. Her eyes were wide and horrified, staring down in front of her. The wind shifted and the tiniest whiff of sickly-sweet terror drifted on the air. A miniscule noise caused my ear to twitch, the noise wasn't coming from her though. The closer I got the more noticeable the sound. The ominous hiss grew louder in my ears and I watched in shock as a huge, unnaturally silent rattlesnake rose up from the space between her and the bird carcass. Its eyes were locked unwaveringly on her torso as it poised to strike. Michelle's eyes closed, hiding a chilling acceptance of impending death.

I lunged forward as the viper struck. Snatching it in my fist, I tightened my fingers viciously, reveling in the crunch of bone. It writhed in my grip, trying to turn its fangs on me. Squeezing until its death throws faded to weak involuntary twitches, my chest heaved in relief as I watched it die.

Moving faster than I'd ever moved before, I had caught the snake mere millimeters from my female's beautiful, fragile skin. A growl rumbled in my chest as its movements slowed and the body began to relax. Her eyes flew open at the sound, locking on the reptile a hairsbreadth from her face. Gasping in fear, she threw herself away from it, scrambling well out of reach. The snake writhed one last time, then shuddered and fell limp.

“Beasty?” That small, frightened voice broke through the murderous rage I felt as I stared at the creature that nearly took my little bird from me. My eyes snapped to her face, she flinched and begin to tremble. Crouched in the grass, she wrapped her arms around her tiny frame, harsh breaths sawed in and out of her chest. Little Bird’s sweet face was damp with tears. Flinging the dead reptile into the trees, I carefully crawled towards the now sobbing girl, reaching for her.

At first, she stiffened when I wrapped my arms about her. I persisted and she allowed me to pull her into my lap. Rubbing her back as she cried, she gradually relaxed into me until her shudders subsided. Her sobs died to sniffles as I gently rocked her.

“Are you okay?” I asked, concerned over the fright she’d just had. She tensed again and pulled free, shoving me away, hard. The face she turned to me was bitter and angry.

“No! I am most certainly ***not*** okay,” she spat, standing and moving out of my reach. “I am a prisoner here! That is not okay! You won’t let me go! That is not okay! You are a disgusting pervert who keeps assaulting and threatening and scaring me! That is not okay! And some…*thing* just tried to kill me with a rattlesnake! So, NO! I am definitely not okay,” she ranted. “I hate it here and I hate you!” She shrieked, turning and shoving at my chest, too small to do more than simply flail at me. Whipping back around, she stormed back into the cabin. The sound of the storeroom door slamming cracked through the air shortly after.

What did she mean when she said some “thing” tried to kill her with the snake? Rattlesnakes were not uncommon in the area, but she made it sound like the snake didn’t just slither up on its own. Searching the area, yielded no signs of anything other than the girl and the dead bird. There were no signs of another’s presence. No tracks, no broken foliage, and no scent. That last thing made me pause, sniffing again. I smelled nothing but the girl and the carcass. There was no sign of the snake. I didn’t smell it at all, not even on my hand where I still had its blood on my fingers from crushing it. I headed into the trees in search of the body, only to discover it had vanished without a trace.

Confused, I returned to the clearing and scooped up the forgotten turkey. Once I had it gutted and over a fire, I called the pack. All six of them came. Carol had been in the cabin with Michelle, I could smell my female on her fur. The rest trotted out of the trees, Shayla trudging out last and glaring balefully at me.

“My female was attacked by a snake,” I growled. “You will watch her at all times when I am not close by. I want at least two of you with her to keep her safe.” At my order, five sets of eyes turned towards Shayla who snarled heatedly at them all. She was the most aggressive and animalistic of the pack. She was vicious and sadistically cruel with her prey. Thriving on the violence, she hunted for the thrill of killing, not just for food. “Not you, Shayla,” I amended. “You will stay away from my female.”

Huffing disdainfully, Shayla trotted out of the clearing with a flick of her tail. I wasn’t really worried about her though. She was pack after all and would obey me whether she liked it or not. If she didn’t, I would kill her and be done with the disagreeable bitch. Unconcerned, I waved the other animals away and went back to watching the turkey cook. Carol and Danny headed back to the cabin and slipped inside, while Eric and the others loped off into the trees to find their own dinners.

In the end, I burned the meat again. It would take some time to get used to cooking over a fire, but at least it was fully cooked, I smelled no blood coming from the meat anymore. That was one thing I remembered about humans. They couldn’t eat raw or undercooked meat without getting really sick. Using my claws, I tore out both sides of the breast meat and peeled as much of the burned areas away as I could. The rest was too dry or burned for her to eat so I dropped it in the grass for the others if they wanted it. The meat I salvaged went into a bowl with some wild berries and edible greens I’d already harvested.

When I opened the door, I found my female was sitting on her bed in the storage room, reading. She glanced irritably over the top of the novel, then went back to her book and ignored me. Sitting beside her, I placed the food in her lap. She promptly moved it to the floor and scooted away from me.

“You will eat,” I growled, pushing it back into her lap. She snapped the book shut and glared at me.

“Why? So you can keep me alive? Why would I want that?” She threw the book down in her tirade. “I’m just going to die here, might as well do it sooner rather than later!”

“You will eat willingly or I will force feed you!”

“Go ahead and try! You can’t force me to chew and if you try to make me swallow it whole, I’ll just choke to death! At least that would get me free of you sooner!” She yelled.

“Not if I chew it for you like a mother wolf!” I exclaimed irately, rising over her. “I will reduce it to a mushy pulp you can swallow easily, pry your mouth open, and feed you that way!”

Her eyes went wide at that statement, then suddenly crinkled with amusement and she burst out laughing. Her howls of mirth completely derailed my ire and I sat back on my heels, staring at her and wondering if she’d actually lost her mind. She almost calmed for a moment, looked up at me and lost her control once again. Falling over on her side as she cracked up once more, she cackled relentlessly into her bedding.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” she chortled as she calmed again. “You said all that and I suddenly had a vision of you with eight titties, nursing puppies!” She pealed with laughter yet again, tears of mirth in her eyes. I chuckled as well, easily picturing what she described.

“I would be one ugly mother,” I commented dryly. My little bird sucked in a breath and erupted into more hysterical guffawing.

“Beasty, I didn’t know you had a sense of humor,” she snarked when she finally subsided. “I needed that.” Sighing heavily, she wiped her eyes and picked up the food. Picking it apart with her fingers, she ate quietly, quickly finishing off a little less than half the bowl before handing it back to me. I eyed her suspiciously.

“I can’t eat that much, big guy,” she explained, cleaning her fingers with a dry hand cloth.

“What did you mean when you said some*thing* tried to kill you with the snake?” I asked picking at the rest of the food.

“I meant what I said. Something came out of the bushes behind me, growling, dropped the snake on the ground, and disappeared,” Michelle stated flatly.

“I found no signs of anything in the…” I started. She interrupted me with a derisive snort.

“What do you call this then?” She asked, angrily yanking the neck of her shirt open and showing me her left shoulder. Four angry red welts dragged across her skin, marring the pale slope of her collarbone and back over her shoulder. In a way, they looked like my own teeth marks. However, they were smaller than mine and bigger than any of my pack mates. They were also on the wrong side. I clearly remembered favoring her right shoulder for my grip each time I subdued her.

“How did…”

“That’s kind of obvious you big, dumb, asshole! Whatever it was raked its teeth across my skin before it left me with the snake! It wanted to mark me,” she snapped, sitting back with a huff and opening her book again. I didn’t know what to say, the mark on her said there was more going on than I knew and I couldn’t seem to wrap my head around it.

I ate the rest of the turkey, watching her read and hoping she would speak to me again. Tense at first, she gradually relaxed the longer the silence lasted. She still ignored me with a vengeance. I didn’t like that. The quiet was simply too quiet, especially now that my birds were gone and I couldn’t hear them in the background of the cabin anymore. It wore on me, made my thoughts itch and burn like a rash.

“What are you reading?” I asked, trying to fill the silence with conversation. She sighed, setting the book aside.

“I am not interested in being chummy with you,” she scoffed pointedly. “I don’t want to converse with you, I don’t want to hang out with you, I don’t want to share my feelings or my life or get to know you at all. You are a brute and a bully, who thinks he can keep me here against my will and I don’t like you. I want to leave! If I knew how to get the fuck

out of this valley, you can bet your ugly ass I would be headed that way in a heartbeat!” Each word she spoke was a slap in the face and I felt an unfamiliar weight in my gut. Uncomfortable and sick to my stomach I struggled to find something to say. Finally, I gave up and shuffled out into the night without another word.

Chapter 27

Michelle

It was obvious I'd managed to hurt his feelings, but I couldn't find it in me to care just then. Every word had been true. I was scared and angry. Getting my freedom back was the one thing that mattered most to me right then and if I had to berate and badger the creature until he gave up on me, I would. He would learn I wasn't some defenseless little sparrow he could lock in a cage and push around. I was stronger than that. Yes, I was scared, but I was willing to fight back. To bite and scratch and claw my way free if I had to.

I tried to go back to my book, but my mind just wasn't in it anymore. Annoyed, I took a change of clothes, my soap, and my towel out of my luggage and headed upstairs. I wanted a shower before it was too dark to see. I had rinsed off after Beasty's unwanted and unwelcome 'affections' this morning, but hadn't taken the time to really wash for fear he would drag me naked from the shower for his dance.

My hair was itchy and gross from not being washed in the last three days, or was it four? How long had I been here already? It felt like forever and yet, no time at all. It would probably be another three or four days before anyone realized I was missing and would come looking for me. My mother would only notice when I didn't show up for the audition. The thought was depressing and a few tears slipped out as I scrubbed under the frigid water.

Shivering, I washed quickly and climbed out. Drying off and dressing as fast as possible, I wrapped my hair in the towel since it was so thick and would take forever to dry. The sun was setting now and I was worn out from the shitty way the day had started and continued. I slid under my covers with a defeated sigh. Tomorrow I would need to find a way to wash my clothes so they wouldn't stink. I still had one or two clean outfits, but that wouldn't last indefinitely.

I was almost out when a big, warm body slid into bed with me. Thick arms pulled me back into a hairy chest and I felt Beasty's muzzle

bury itself in my hair. He sighed contentedly as he cuddled me against his filthy fur. I groaned irritably.

“Why do you insist on getting into my bed? You know damn well I don’t want you touching me,” I griped, wriggling and trying to push him away. He growled unconvincingly and tightened his grip on me.

“I like it here,” he replied sleepily.

“Well, I don’t like you here! You’re dirty, you smell bad, and I hate you,” I complained, shoving at his arm.

“Then you can help me wash tomorrow. You are clean, you smell good, and I like you. For now, sleep,” he ordered unfazed by my struggles.

“You have your own bed! Why can’t you sleep there and leave me alone?” I whined unhappily. His arm hadn’t moved an inch.

“Hurts less when I sleep with you,” he murmured drowsily, nuzzling my ear. I froze, wondering at that statement.

“What hurts less?” I asked. Beasty grumbled lightly but didn’t answer. I nudged him with my elbow, drawing a questioning grunt. “Beasty, what hurts less?” I prodded him again.

“Everything,” he sighed, before dropping back to sleep. His body relaxed, pressing against me now, though his arms still held me close, something hard dug into the back of my shoulder. I was mildly alarmed by his answer and spent some time wondering what it meant until I finally dozed off myself.

“Wakey, wakey, Tiny Dancer,” Logan’s voice rumbled sexily in my ear. I smiled at the feel of his arms around me. Opening my eyes, I found we were lying in a bed in a dark, unfamiliar room. His bright green eyes smiled down at me. “Hello there,” he drawled with a cheeky grin.

“Hi yourself,” I smiled in return. “Where are we this time?”

“I don’t know yet,” he answered with a shrug. “I was waiting for you. This room feels familiar though. Shall we check?”

“What kind of adventure would it be if we didn’t?” I replied, slipping off the bed and running to the window. Throwing the curtains, I gasped at the sight outside the window and squealed in delight.

“What’s out there my love?” Logan asked, rising from the bed.

“Holy crap, we’re in Paris!” I shouted gleefully dancing in place.

“Really? Wow,” he said as he joined me at the window. The Parisian skyline was amazing. The Eiffel Tower rose proudly in the distance, beckoning tourists to approach and see the city from its pinnacle.

“Have you been here before?” I asked, looking up at him.

“I think so,” he answered shrugging. “Have you?”

“Yes! My ballet company was here two years ago for a competition,” I said excitedly. “It was the best week of my life! Everything is so beautiful here!”

“Yes, it is,” he commented smoothly. I looked up again to find him staring down at me instead of looking out the window. I blushed, the heat in his gaze caused an answering warmth to curl in the pit of my belly.

“Let’s explore,” I blurted. Logan smiled warmly.

“Perhaps you should dress first?” He teased. Looking down at myself, I realized I was barely wearing anything. Unlike Logan’s snug black jeans and white button down, I was clad in the frilly cami and shorts set I usually wore on hot nights at home. Most of my body was exposed to Logan’s eyes. His smug perusal of my body was hungry and appreciative. I blushed again.

“How come I wake up nearly naked, but you’re fully dressed?” I demanded, lightly slapping his arm. He chuckled sexily.

“Don’t blame me, tiny dancer,” he chided laughingly. “It’s your brain that picks the outfits. You can change it if you want, just decide what you want to wear and make it appear.” He said that like it was the most natural thing in the world and, maybe here, maybe it was.

Closing my eyes, I pictured my favorite pink sweater. It was light and loose, hanging almost to my knees and complimented my hair perfectly. It paired perfectly with most of my leggings and so I added a comfy pair of capri leggings that were black and covered in tiny pink roses. Strappy sandals wrapped around my ankles and I felt the familiar weight of earrings hanging from my lobes.

“Very nice,” Logan praised. Looking down, I marveled at how incredibly real it all felt. Running to the mirror, I stared in amazement as I pictured my hair in a loose updo and light makeup on my face. Delighted with the results, I turned to find Logan watching me closely.

Stepping towards me, he took my hand and twirled me in a slow pirouette that pulled me into the circle of his arms. The warmth of his chest felt so nice on my back. I wanted to stay here forever. I spied our embrace in the mirror and watched in wonder as he trailed his nose along the curve of my neck, his breath hot on my skin. Goosebumps broke out on my arms with a shiver.

Leaning into him, I tilted my head as he nuzzled my right shoulder. His lips skimmed the sensitive spot behind my ear and I gasped. Nipples beading under my sweater as a thrill skittered through me, I suddenly felt breathless and shaky. My knees went weak when that deep gorgeous voice of his started humming the chorus to Tiny Dancer.

“We should get going,” I stammered nervously, gently extricating myself from his embrace. Logan caught my hand, pressing a quick kiss to the back and led me towards the door.

Stepping through it and out into the sunlight, I was surprised that we exited straight onto the street, but that was just how this dream world seemed to work. No waiting, no wasted time. If we wanted to go somewhere, we were there.

“Where shall we go, my tiny dancer?” Logan asked silkily. I shivered again.

“Well, what do you know of Paris?” I countered.

“We could visit the Catacombs. Or the Louvre if you like. I feel like I’ve been to those places so I’ll remember the insides, I think. Or…I seem to remember there being a lovely café near the Eiffel Tower that serves excellent coffee and the best macarons,” he suggested, looking thoughtful.

“I know that café! I went there every day we were in Paris,” I exclaimed, jumping up and down.

“Then we shall start there,” Logan announced, offering his elbow. Laughing, I took his arm and we set off for the café.

After coffee and a mountain of warm macarons, that tasted as amazing as I remembered but never filled me up, we visited the Louvre and explored the various galleries. We discovered that Logan knew a lot about the archeological displays and he became rather animated as he talked about them.

"You must have been a historian or something," I commented.

"What makes you say that?" He chuckled.

"Think about it, you know so much about this stuff," I exclaimed waving at a display of broken stone age pottery he'd been telling me about.

"I guess that's possible, but I don't think so. It doesn't feel quite right," he said with a shrug. "What do you want to see next? The Greek gallery or the works of the Italian masters?"

"The Treasures of the Orient!" I demanded.

"Of course, how silly of me," he laughed, steering me to the next gallery. "Onward my lady!"

After the museum, we wandered the streets. Strolling aimlessly down the thoroughfares, I spotted a familiar sight and squealed excitedly. I was doing that a lot today apparently. Pulling Logan behind me, I ran to the old theater.

"I know this place! This is the theater we danced in when we came for the competition," I explained delightedly.

"I'm afraid I don't know what this place looks like inside," Logan said apologetically.

"Don't worry, I do," I stated confidently. "Come on, I'll show you!" I dragged Logan through the big doors and into the opulent lobby. Not stopping there, we hurried into the theater itself, where I shoved him into a chair in the front row. "Wait here!" I ordered.

Climbing the stairs to the stage, I ran through the curtains and into the wings. The rich red velvet was just as plush as I remembered, the gold accents just as bright. Closing my eyes briefly, I imagined an orchestra in the pit and the opening chords of my favorite ballet filled the air. It was Giselle, a tragic but beautiful story of a poor girl who falls in love with a

rich man. She dies of heartbreak when they can't be together and returns as a spirit. But instead of seeking vengeance on her former lover, she forgives him and protects him from being harmed by other, more vengeful beings.

My outfit was different when I opened my eyes. Now I wore a dove grey leotard with powder blue accents. The skirt consisted of floaty strips of grey and blue chiffon and silk, giving me an ethereal appearance as I moved. Elegant silver toe shoes hugged my feet, the ribbons wrapped up my legs and tied behind my knees. My hair was swept up into a loose chignon and threaded through with more silver and blue ribbons.

Suddenly, I was surrounded by other dancers, all waiting for their cue, waiting for me. This was my dream after all and in my dream, I wasn't too short to be the lead. Here, I was anything I wanted to be. I was finally dancing the one position I'd never get to dance in real life.

I ran out of the wings and took my position behind the curtains. The other dancers followed me out and posed around me. When the curtains parted, I spared an excited glance at Logan before flowing into the steps of the dance.

I turned, stepped, pranced, and soared across the stage. Rising to my toes or dipping into a sweep, the others followed, moving in sync with me. I danced, remembering how much I loved to dance. It brought me joy, no matter which position I danced, it brought me so much joy. So I danced for Logan and I danced for myself. This was what I loved about dancing, not the audience, not the applause, nor where my name was in the program. It was simply the dance, the feeling of being a bird in flight. The beauty of the graceful motions, the heat of the lights, and the costumes and colors. There was the richness of the music and the weight of history in the old ballets.

I lived for this. My mother railed each time I was passed over for the lead, but I didn't care even half as much as she did. I loved whatever part I got so long as I got to dance.

My resentment at Beasty's demands that I dance faded. If my dancing made him happy too, what was there to be angry about. I still got to dance, it made me happy and it changed him, made him less beastly

somehow. Perhaps Logan was right. Maybe it would help him one day. Maybe dancing would be what freed me in the end. At least I got to dance. If nothing else it gave me some peace and would keep me sane in the days to come.

Eyes closed, I spun through another turn and collided with a hard body. Logan's hands gripped my shoulders as he steadied me. Looking up at him, the other dancers and the orchestra faded away until it was just the two of us in the middle of the stage. His eyes burned with need as he stared intensely at me.

"Logan?" I whispered uncertainly. My tongue darted out to lick my lips, his gaze followed the movement. He bent and crushed his lips against mine. My head spun as I gasped. Tongue slipping between my lips, he stroked the inside of my mouth. I moaned a little, pushing upwards into him, wanting so much more. I clutched at his shirt, pulling desperately at him. His hands shifted, one cradled the back of my head, the other cupped my ass through my skirt, jerking me tight against his erection. He felt huge and hard, hot even through our clothes. His lips left my mouth and trailed along my neck and shoulder. Shivers skated through my body and my pussy clenched wetly, empty and wanting.

Logan lifted me up and sat me on a table that appeared behind me. My nipples were hard points that threatened to tear through the thin leotard. His mouth closed, hot and wet, over one as he suckled me through the fabric, drawing another moan from me. Shuddering at the sensations, I fisted his hair, holding him to my breast. Pressing my knees apart, he pushed the strips of the skirt apart and pulled at the crotch of the leotard, slipping underneath with ease.

I spasmed at the first sweep of his fingers against my pussy. So hot and slick with need, I panted when he circled my clit, pressing on the sensitive nub while his mouth switched to the other nipple, lightly biting before sucking it into his mouth as well. Harder and faster, he stroked and sucked, driving me to dizzying heights. I mewled and cried out, keening under his hands and mouth.

His free hand fisted the front of my top and ripped the delicate fabric open, freeing my breasts so he could feast on my bare skin. Shifting,

he plunged his fingers into me, stroking the inside of my body while his tongue dragged over my tender nipple. Curling his hand against me, he ground his palm over my clit on each thrust of his fingers. My body tightened almost painfully and I jerked in his arms, back arching and head falling back as he drove me even higher. Suddenly he bit down on my nipple at the same time that he twisted his fingers, stroking a hidden place deep inside and I shattered. Screaming my pleasure into the empty theater, I orgasmed all over his hand, my nails digging into his shoulders as I held tight to him.

He pulled me into his chest and held me until my tremors subsided. Exhausted, I lay me head on his shoulder, panting for air. He stiffened abruptly. Leaning back a little, I saw a disgruntled look on his face as he stared over my shoulder. A quick glance revealed nothing in the darkened wing behind me.

"What is it?" I asked worriedly. He smiled sadly at me.

"Unfortunately, I have to go now, tiny dancer," he stated, stroking my cheek with his knuckles.

"What? No! I don't want you to go yet," I protested.

"So very flattering my darling," he chuckled, stepping away from me. "Believe me little one, I would very much like to finish what we started, but I can't stay this time." With that, he faded away, leaving me sitting alone on the stage.

An ominous growl rose from the wings and I jerked to look in the direction it came from. Angry, red eyes glowered at me from the darkness. It snarled and I caught a glimpse of shiny white teeth, dripping with saliva. Fearfully, I fled the dream world, falling into wakefulness and lurching awake with a cry.

"Little Bird?" Beasty crouched on the bedding to the side of me. I couldn't tell if he was just getting up or had been up and come to check on me. "Are you well?"

"Yeah, just had a bad dream," I admitted honestly, still panting a little.

“Must not have been that bad,” he teased, leering at me. “You came in your sleep. It was beautiful. And you smell so delicious now. I wouldn’t mind a taste,” he leaned over me, reaching for the sheet I held against me.

“Touch me like that again and I’ll do more than just crotch kick you,” I warned angrily. He stared thoughtfully at me, nostrils flaring as he scented me.

“Pity,” he sighed finally, then, shockingly, backed away and left me alone. Watching him walk away, I relaxed onto the bedding, still trembling from my orgasm, the scare I’d had, and embarrassment that Beasty had witnessed the ending of my wet dream.

Chapter 28

Beasty

I went straight to the forest to get away from the girl and her glorious scent. My cock had already been hard when I woke with the sound of her cries in my ears. The feel of her quaking body in my arms and her panting into my fur had almost been too much. I'd opened my eyes to find my hand cupped over her soaked panties, her scent coating my paw. I'd struggled out of the bed, resisting the urge to sink my dick into her cunt. Just as I was going to flee the room, she'd bolted awake, fear souring her scent.

Still hard, despite her rejection, I hurried away from the cabin. Her cries of pleasure still rang in my ears, clear and sweet with passion. Whatever her dream, it must have been amazing. Imagining those sounds as I took myself in hand, I stroked until I came with a cry of my own, spilling my seed on the forest floor yet again.

Eventually catching my breath, I walked through the woods to the stream that flowed nearby. It usually ran rough and muddy right after the rain, but it was now calm and clear. Good, I wanted to take advantage of that.

Circling back to the cabin, I found the girl up and dancing in the partially cleaned front room. She saw me walk in, but continued to float serenely through the steps, avoiding the blood stains from the turkey. There was something different about her today, something freer. She moved without the resentment she'd had the first few times I'd made her dance. This dance wasn't forced, but willingly given. I watched quietly until she finished, loving the light sheen of sweat on skin as she sank to the ground in a graceful curve of limbs.

"Very pretty," I praised. She actually gave me a small smile, but said nothing. "Come Little Bird," I ordered, waving her to rise.

"Where are we going?" She asked warily as she stood.

“You have protested my odor and lack of cleanliness; therefore, you shall help me improve the state of my hygiene,” I stated seriously, waiting for her complaints or refusal. She eyed me contemplatively for a moment, then shrugged and walked into the storeroom. Quickly returning with a bottle in hand, she motioned for me to lead the way. I turned towards the door.

“Aren’t we going upstairs?” She asked hesitantly.

“Do you really think I could wash properly in that tiny bathroom?” I countered.

“You are kinda big and weirdly shaped, so I guess not,” she agreed mischievously.

“Such high compliments, thank you,” I said with a snort of amusement. She only grinned again before following me out the door. “What is that you carry?” I asked, curiously eyeing the bottle in her hand.

“Dawn dish soap. I found a couple bottles while I was cleaning yesterday. I don’t have nearly enough shampoo to wash all…that,” she explained with a gesture at my fur. “Besides, we always used this on the dog when I was a kid so…” she shrugged without finishing.

“I think I resent that,” I commented stiffly.

“Chill out Beasty, I wasn’t calling you a dog, I was just saying this stuff shouldn’t irritate your skin or dry out your fur since it’s safe to use on animals and people. You can’t claim to be neither after all, you’re more like both,” she answered with a huff. I grumbled under my breath but refrained from arguing with her.

Further complaints would only damage the tenuous peace we had this morning. I didn’t want her angry and yelling again just yet. Which surprised me. Only days ago, I wouldn’t have cared. I would have reveled in her anger and fear. Maybe something was different about us, about me at least. But what was changing? Why was everything changing? I wasn’t sure I liked it.

Reaching the stream, I waded in, shuddering at the chilly mountain water. Ducking under, I quickly soaked my fur. A squeaky yelp drew my attention to the girl, who had rolled up her leggings and was edging

barefoot into the cold water to join me. Stepping closer, I offered my hand and, after a small hesitation, she actually accepted my help and let me pull her further into the creek.

Once her footing was steady, she let go and motioned for me to sit in front of her. Crouching on my heels, I felt her dribble soap all over my head and shoulders, then her tiny hands sunk into my fur, fingertips scrubbing down to the skin underneath. It was heaven.

She paused uncertainly at the sound of the happy groans I couldn't contain, but I leaned into her hands and she started again. Her nails scratched over my scalp and around my ears, making my eyes roll back into my head with a low moan. A tiny chuckle from her barely registered, I was so blissed out. She moved on to my shoulders, digging through the mats and lathering the soap to a frothy mass.

"Here," she said pausing. "Wash your face, then start on your chest and arms." She leaned around and squirted soap into my hands. Doing as I was told, I rubbed it into my face and front while she worked on my back still. Again, those glorious nails sank through the hair to scratch and scrub all the way to the skin. My own hands faltered as I groaned my enjoyment. She uttered another amused sound as she worked.

As she worked, I felt every tug whenever she pulled out mats or tangled bits of trash. Occasionally, there was a sharp pinch and she would mutter curses about ticks and other vermin. Urging me to stand, she continued down to my lower back, passing me more soap as I scrubbed my front.

My part took longer and I was definitely less thorough because she had to remind me to wash every so often. Her hands felt so good, I kept stopping while my brain focused on the pleasure her fingers elicited. I was so fixated on how good her hands felt, that I jolted in surprise when they closed around my tail and started rubbing soap into the ragged fur. She let go at my jump.

"Did I hurt you?" She asked worried. Her honest concern humbled me. I'd done nothing to deserve it.

“No, just startled a little. It feels really good,” I answered honestly, looking over my shoulder at the little female. She looked away uncomfortably.

“Well, quit being weird or I’m not going to help you anymore,” she announced prissily. I chuckled at her tone. “And you’re on your own for everything waist down!” She went back to washing my tail, picking out the tangles she found, and ignoring me.

I carefully combed out the knots around my neck, making sure my sparkly little treasure was carefully tucked out of sight. Scrubbing my claws through the pelt on my chest, I snagged on a big mass of matted fur hiding under the surface. Pulling at it, I found I couldn’t get my claws out.

“Uh, could you help me with this mat?” I asked, trying to untangle my claws. She ducked under my elbow to see what the problem was and had to smother a laugh at my predicament. In trying to untangle one hand, I’d managed to get both stuck. Reaching up, she deftly unhooked my fingers from the mat, then set to work pulling the knot to pieces with her hands.

Looking down to watch her, I realized that this was the first time I really considered just how small she was compared to me. The top of her head barely reached the middle of my chest. Her body was strong and graceful from her dancing, but so delicate and fragile seeming at the same time. Her hair shifted away from her neck and the sight of my teeth marks in the soft skin of her neck and shoulder reminded me of my repulsive behavior. I was suddenly uncomfortable with the way I’d treated the tiny, fragile female in my care. I put my paw over hers, stopping her for a moment. She froze, eyes widening with alarm.

“I hope I haven’t hurt you,” I said hesitantly, awkwardly patting her hand with one of mine and tracing the marks with the other. She pulled her hands free, then haltingly resumed picking at the mat and not looking at me.

“You haven’t, not really,” she admitted finally. “You have scared me and I don’t want to stay here, but other than being a complete asshole, you haven’t injured me.”

“Good, good. I know my social skills are out of practice. I’m not usually such a flirt,” I joked lightly, trying to make fun of my attitude. “At least I don’t think so.”

“Yes, well, I’ve never met anyone quite as…charming as you,” she stated dryly, taking her hands off me. “You’re on your own for the rest of it. My feet are frozen,” she announced, wading out of the water and perching on a nearby rock to dry her feet. She didn’t wander away, but it was obvious her attention was elsewhere.

Shrugging at her distracted behavior, I went back to washing. Despite the chilled water, I was enjoying my bath. I’d forgotten how good it felt to be clean. The bottle of soap sat on a partially submerged rock nearby so I was able to get more soap myself. Scraping the dirt and tangles out of the hair on my legs and around my genitals felt like a revelation and I groaned aloud as I scratched all around the area. A light snort of amusement failed to smother my enjoyment of a good ball scratching.

“Men,” she muttered mockingly, shaking her head.

Once I finished, I submerged fully in the deeper part of the creek to rinse off. Blinded by water and soap, I climbed out by feel and shook the excess water out of my fur like an animal. I flung water in every direction, grinning in anticipation of outraged feminine shrieks. Instead, there was silence. Whipping around to where she’d been sitting, I found her gone, the rock vacant. I perked my ears, listening for her. The forest was eerily quiet. I even had trouble hearing the rush of the water beside me. Something was wrong.

Chapter 29

Michelle

I heard a car! I know I heard a car, I thought as I rushed through the trees. It had been such a weird moment when Beasty had sort of apologized for being a dick. Feeling off balance and needing a moment to myself, I fled the creek, intending to return to the cabin.

Walking back to the clearing, I had just left sight of the stream when the sound of a car engine reached me, turning me away from both the cabin and the stream. It sounded close. Maybe there was a road nearby. If I could reach it, I could follow it to safety, maybe flag down a car. I felt only the tiniest twinge of guilt over abandoning Beasty, but I wanted freedom. I wanted escape. Whatever this situation was, there was no way it could end well.

“Little Bird?” Beasty called worriedly. As quickly and quietly as I could I hurried barefoot over the rough terrain. A disembodied growl echoed in my head, spurring me faster. My heart pounded, chest ached, bare feet stinging as I ran.

“Little Bird!” Beasty roared somewhere behind me. Strange and unwelcome, a feeling of panic washed over me, pushing me recklessly through the forest. The sound of a big body crashing through the underbrush followed me, growing louder. My vision blurred as my breathing grew more labored.

The ground sloped upwards, straining my legs. I ran as long as I could, but the angle soon grew too steep. Fear drove me higher and I found myself crawling up the embankment, clawing at roots and limbs in a desperate effort to reach the top.

“Stop! Stop, Little Bird! Get down from there!” A voice yelled behind me. The growling in my head made it hard to hear and impossible to identify. I knew only an unexplainable terror that demanded I keep going.

Just as I’d almost reached the top, my footing slipped. The limb I held broke under my weight and I fell. Sliding and rolling down the embankment, stars exploded behind my eyes when I smacked into a rock. My momentum tumbled me head over heels back the way I’d come. Strong arms caught me, stopping my physical descent, but not the darkness that rushed over me.

“Why did you try to fly away, Little Bird? Must I cage you now too?” The rough voice murmured sadly as I faded away.

Chapter 30

Beasty

The scariest thing I'd ever witnessed was the sight of my female's small body bouncing down the embankment. How she had gotten up there when it was nearly a straight up cliff, I may never know but watching her fall was something I desperately wanted to forget. Cradling her close, I hurried back to the cabin. She was scraped, bruised, and bleeding in several places, but the head wound worried me so much more than any of the other injuries. A gash just above her eye bled profusely down her face, giving her a macabre red mask and soaking her shirt.

She'd uttered a single word before passing out in my arms. I'd caught her tumbling form, taking the brunt of the impact, and when I'd questioned her flight, her pale lips had muttered the word 'scared.' Scared of what though? Me? Or something else? The smell of her fear had been strong, fouling her delicate scent. Warily, I eyed the gloomy woods as I rushed home, but, other than myself and my female, there was no sign of anything bigger than the rabbits on the ground and birds above us.

Upon reaching the cabin, I lay the girl on her bed and used a nearby towel to wipe the blood from her face. The bleeding had slowed, but not stopped. The cut on her forehead was not nearly as bad as the bleeding had suggested, but it was still an open wound along her hairline. It would likely scar, but maybe I could minimize it. There was an old first aid kit somewhere around here, I just had to find it.

The pain in my limbs had returned, worse than before and I limped heavily up the stairs to look for the kit. It made me cross and irritable. The growl in my mind came back as my displeasure grew. It whispered things, awful things, telling me to take what I wanted and dispose of the troublesome female. It wanted rid of the burden and aggravation of keeping the human. I couldn't concentrate, couldn't think over the noise in my skull. By the time I finally found the kit under the bathroom sink, I'd almost forgotten why I needed it. I was snarling under my breath as I stumbled back down the stairs with it.

Carol stood in the doorway between the girl and I. She dropped her head and growled warningly at me, refusing to move. Stupid little bitch thought she could protect the little bird from me. No match for me, I swiped her out of my way and sent her tumbling into a wall. Already dismissing the foolish animal, I turned into the storeroom. More blood oozed down her face and I swiped roughly at her skin to clean it. I froze when she whimpered pitifully at my manhandling. The growl in my head stuttered and lost volume as I gazed at the delicate dancer in my home. A song, both familiar and yet not, filtered through my thoughts. It brought with it a broken, yet calming sense of peace. I was still unsettled, but my thoughts were less aggressive now.

More gently, I resumed washing her face and drying around the cut. Clumsily, I peeled the paper off a band aid and pinched the edges of the wound together before applying it to her head. It was crooked and stuck to her hair, but it would do until she woke and could use the smaller strips to fix it herself.

I crouched, staring at her and fiddling with my pendant as I thought. I'd almost lost her. Whether to the fall or to escaping the valley, my little dancer nearly got away. What would I do if she was gone? If she died? Where would that leave me? How would I survive her loss?

With a sigh of regret, I dragged my aching body back up the stairs and went to work.

Chapter 31

Michelle

I woke up sore, my head throbbed unmercifully, and the air was chilly on my naked skin. Wait…what? Why was I naked again? My eyes popped open and I jerked upright. With a groan I fell back again as pain flared through me. Carefully probing my head, I felt a spike of agony and the sticky edges of a bandage in my hair.

Catching my breath, I tried again. This time I moved very slowly, gingerly rising to a sitting position. Blinking to clear the tears from my eyes, I looked around. The room was dark, but not as dark as the storeroom would be. It also smelled funny. There was a weird musty odor in the air that made me realize I was in the bird room. The windows were on the wrong side of the room, letting in just enough moonlight for me to stare shocked and disbelieving at the sight in front of me.

Reaching out, I carefully touched the lattice of wiring that cut me off from the rest of the room. Incredulous, I explored it with my fingers. It stretched the length and breadth of the pallet I'd lain on and crossed over my head, not even an arm's length over my seated position. A cage. I was in a cage. It was just big enough to sit up or lay down in. And I was naked. The edges of my bed were pinned by the sides of the cage and the whole thing seemed to be weighed down by a tabletop. Everything was secured in such a way that I couldn't pull a blanket up to cover myself with.

"Beasty! Get your hairy ass in here, you sorry son of a bitch!" I shrieked furiously, grabbing the wire of the cage. I hissed as my hand caught on something sharp and it pissed me off even more. I yanked on the sides of the cage, rattling the metal and loosing a scream of incoherent rage.

"If you don't stop, you'll hurt yourself," his voice cautioned softly from across the room. I squinted and could just barely pick out his dark form hidden in the shadows on the far wall. His eyes flashed as he shifted to stand.

“Why the fuck am I in a cage?” I demanded angrily.

“You tried to fly away little bird,” he accused. I felt a chill at his ominous tone.

“What? No, I…”

“YOU TRIED TO FLY AWAY!” He roared, slamming his fists down on top of the cage. I flinched, cringing away from him.

“Something was chasing me,” I explained, offering partial honesty and trying to stay calm.

“Me! I was chasing you! Because you ran!”

“No! Before you came after me. I heard a noise, I wanted to see what it was. Then I got scared and I panicked. I felt like something was chasing me,” I shook with anger and fear as I begged him to believe me.

“There was nothing else there,” he stated coldly. “Not a track, not a scent, not a sign of anything but you and me!”

“Well, there was something there! And why am I naked again?”

“Your clothes were torn and dirtied when you fell,” he replied simply.

“So give me new clothes,” I growled.

“No. You will stay as you are so that I may see all of you whenever I like,” Beasty’s smile was feral and dark.

“This is bullshit! You can’t keep me like this!” I snapped, shaking the cage again.

“I can and I will! You will not leave me! I won’t let you go!” With that he spun on his heels and stormed out, slamming the door so hard it bounced open again.

“Get back in here you ugly motherfucker! I’m not done with you!” I screamed after him. He didn’t come back. “God damned piece of shit!” I raged, kicking and bashing at the cage until my hands and feet were bruised, scraped, and even a bit bloody. When my rage wore down, I cried. I cried huge, ugly, heart rending sobs of anger and unhappiness. Eventually, I passed out from exhaustion.

Strong arms wrapped around me and I opened my eyes to find myself held tight against a warm chest. Logan smiled sadly down at me. Cradled in his lap, we sat together in my new cage. At least I had clothes on in this dream.

"So…this is new," he observed dryly.

"Yeah, no kidding," I replied, sitting up a bit. "This really sucks."

"Perhaps I can cheer you up. Close your eyes, Tiny Dancer." Doing as he asked, I felt the change. The light grew brighter, the air drier. A stiff wind blew hot and fresh over me. The sudden chatter of random voices made me open my eyes in surprise and I gasped aloud at the sight before me.

We now sat on a cot under a shady awning. The ground around us was hot, brown sand that shifted with the wind. Bright white tents surrounded us like a snowy village. Turning towards the sound of tools and voices, my mouth fell open in shock when I spied a pyramid in the distance. Much closer though, I spotted the top of a wooden scaffolding rising from a cloud of dust.

"Are we…," I started, incredulously.

"In Egypt? Yes, we are," he interrupted with a chuckle. "I worked here. I think," he added, scratching his head sheepishly.

"You worked here!? Where? Doing what?"

"Whoa there, slow down," he said, laughing at my excited questions. "To answer you, yes, over there, and I don't know, but we could go have a look if you'd like." He waved vaguely in the direction of the work site.

"Yes! Let's," I declared jumping to my feet. He laughed again, climbing to his feet and offering his elbow. I practically dragged him through the tent city until we reached our destination.

Standing at the edge, we looked down into a massive flat-bottomed pit that was very obviously hand carved from the surrounding ground. Cut in layers, ladders provided access to the various levels. Here and there, awnings had been set up to shade various work tables and seating areas.

Chunks of broken walls rose out of the ground; the skeletons of a dead city slowly being unearthed. Portions of the pit were roped off in squares and most of the workers were concentrated around those grids. Dozens of people bustled back and forth carrying buckets and tools or they knelt in the sand with brushes, examining the ground in front of them. They chattered or yelled, gossiping and calling for tools or other people. The din was incredible.

"It's a dig site." Logan's flat observation broke through my stunned wonder.

"Like an archeological dig?" I asked looking up at him. He nodded slowly, still watching the people below us. "So, are you an archeologist then?"

"I don't know," he shrugged helplessly. "There are so many jobs at a site like this. You have engineers who handle the equipment, setup, and maintenance. There are porters that take care of camp responsibilities, photographers taking pictures of everything and documenting the finds. Cooks, assistants, interns, doctors, safety personnel, techs, even water boys and so many more," he explained, pointing out the various people as they worked. "I could have been any of them. Hell, I could be a fucking tourist having a lookie-loo for all I know!" His statement was punctuated with a finger stabbed in the direction of a group of sightseers on the far side of the dig taking pictures. His expression was rather frustrated and grumpy.

"I don't believe you were a tourist. You know too much about places like this and their history. Remember Paris? You knew so much about the artifacts in the museum. A tourist might know some of it but not as much as you do," I said, patting his arm reassuringly. Mouth opened to reply, he was suddenly interrupted by a shout from below.

"Logan! Hey Logan!" We peered over the edge. A man in dusty khakis stood at the bottom of the scaffolding about thirty feet down. He waved wildly for our attention. Logan glanced questioningly at me. I shrugged, unsure what to do.

"Uh. Yeah?" He finally called down to the man.

“What are you doing up there? Dr. Nelson needs you at the pavilion,” the man yelled back.

“I guess that answers the tourist or not question,” I murmured teasingly.

“I’m uh, just taking a quick break. I’ll be right down,” Logan replied loudly with a wave. The other man gave a thumbs up and scurried away. “Shall we go down and meet Dr. Nelson?” Logan asked, holding out his hand.

“I’d love to,” I stated, reaching for him.

Just before our hands touched, a rage filled snarl cut through the air. The people disappeared abruptly and the radiant blue sky cracked open with black lightning. A dark ominous force shoved me from behind and I careened out into the open air above the pit which was suddenly much deeper. I screamed as gravity dragged me down.

“Michelle!” Logan roared, his voice a mix of panic and anger. He lunged after me.

Hand closing tightly around my wrist, Logan caught me. I jerked to a hard stop. Looking up, I realized we were both dangling from the side of the scaffolding at a precarious height. Logan’s features were strained from the effort to hold onto the railing and pull me back up.

“Wake up!” He shouted.

“What?”

“You have to wake up!” Logan ordered.

“I thought you said it couldn’t hurt me here!” I accused, scrambling to grab his wrist with my other hand.

“Something has changed! It’s here and you need to wake up! Right now!” Desperation cracked in his voice as he looked around fearfully.

I could see the railing cracking under our weight. The scaffolding tilted and shuddered like it was trying to dislodge us. The ground heaved and the framework snapped free of its anchors, throwing us both into the air.

I jerked upright with a start, heart pounding. Chest heaving, I peered at my surroundings and was almost relieved to find myself back in the cage in Beasty's cabin. At least it meant I was awake and safe. Didn't it?

A thin blanket had been draped over me, proving the cage could be opened, I just didn't know how. I clutched the flimsy material against me, shivering in the aftermath of that dream.

A low growl rolled out of the darkness. Angry red eyes glared at me from a shadow that seemed so much darker than the rest. The sound grew more threatening as I locked eyes with the malevolence across the room from me. The air changed, it felt like the being was gathering itself to attack me. I was terrified. I did the only thing I could think of. Sucking in a deep breath, I let it out as loud as I could.

"BEASTY!" I screamed fearfully.

Chapter 32

Beasty

I jolted awake from a dream I couldn't remember, heart racing and panting heavily. The room felt darker than normal, even for my night vision. Then I heard a sound that tore me to the bone.

"BEASTY!!" My female screamed for me once again. But not in anger this time. No, this time her scream was filled with terror. I lunged off the old mattress, tripping over a tangle of sheets. Barreling through the bathroom, I slammed the door to the bird room open with a snarl and thrust myself between the cage and the rest of the room, the…empty room. Confused, I searched the shadows and corners of the room from where I crouched protectively in front of my last bird. There was no denying something had frightened her. Her fear scent saturated the air and I could hear the rapid staccato beating of her heart.

"What happened?" I demanded, turning to her. She stiffened at my tone and pulled her sheet tighter to her body.

"There was something here!"

"What was it?" I growled, sniffing the air, but again, there was no other scent to back up her claim.

"I don't know dammit! If I did, I'd have said, oh golly, it was a blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," she retorted prissily. "All I know is I woke up from a bad dream and there was something growling at me. It had red glowing eyes and it was scary!" I couldn't help my grin at her spark. Even angry and frightened she still fought me with everything she had.

"Where did you see it?" I asked, gentling my tone.

"Over there," she pointed at a dark corner near the open balcony doors. I vaguely recalled closing those doors. The latch was broken though and it could have easily popped open on its own.

Examining the area, I found no scent, no trace of anything having been there. The proximity to the open doors would make it easy for

something to slip out that way when I came in. Stepping onto the balcony, I looked over the railing into the nighttime darkness.

A tuft of black fur was caught on the railing, pinched under a sliver of wood. It could have been mine, but it didn't smell like me. It didn't smell like anything. Even the wood around it seemed to have lost its natural odor. Following the hair over the railing, I landed in a crouch in the grass. I saw it before I even stood up.

A handprint, freshly made, smaller than my own, but bigger than my little bird's would be. It was smooshed into the ground right in front of me, just like the ones I left in the dirt whenever I jumped over the rail. Like my own handprints, this one was also long fingered, huge claws had left deep furrows in the soil. Unlike mine though, the fingers were oddly jointed, the hand itself more twisted and strangely shaped than mine, claws longer. Unfortunately, it was the only one I found. Beyond the first print there was nothing more, no trail, no bent grass, no scent, no further trace of the intruder. So much so that I doubted whether the print was real or a result of my unstable imagination.

Aggravated, I climbed back up to the balcony. Wedging the doors shut once more, I used a leftover piece of wire to secure it. Cool air still flowed through the broken windows, but it would be harder for something to sneak in. My female watched quietly from her cage.

"Well?" She asked finally.

"There was a print but no trail," I admitted reluctantly. "I am uncertain as to its origin."

"Now do you believe me when I said I felt like I was being chased?" She challenged expectantly, sitting up to curl her fingers through the wires. Part of me felt a small twinge of guilt, but the possessive beast reared its ugly head and drowned out the guilt.

"I'm not letting you out," I growled.

"Oh for the love of…You are a real jackass ya know? This is bullshit!" She exclaimed, angrily kicking the cage.

Ignoring her, I limped into the other room and dragged my bedding off the mattress. Pulling it through the bathroom, I laid it on the floor by

the cage. The little bird glared sulkily at me, sitting with her arms crossed over her knees. The sheet barely covered her body, but I resented it for hiding any of her beautiful skin from me.

“I need to pee,” she grumbled irritably.

“Then pee,” I replied without looking at her.

“You’re not seriously suggesting I pee in here are you? I can’t pee here and then sleep in it! I wouldn’t even do that to a dog!” Her voice rose slightly with her distressed complaints. I continued to arrange my bedding. The girl groaned dramatically at my silence, then huffed a loud sigh.

“Please Beasty. Don’t make me soil my own bed. I promise I’ll behave,” she pleaded prettily. I eyed her sternly for a moment before giving a grunt and walking over.

Unbending the thick wires that held the cage together, I removed the end panel and held it while she crawled out. Carefully clutching the sheet around herself, she eased passed me. I had to resist the urge to rip it off her.

“Leave the door open,” I ordered as she scurried by. She looked up at me sharply, but wisely held her tongue. Having her out of the cage had set my nerves more on edge than before.

I listened as she relieved herself and splashed water on her face. When she reappeared, she had wrapped a towel over her sheet, covering more of herself from my sight. My teeth ground together, gnashing as my mood darkened.

The full moon outside lent just enough light for her to make her way across the room, but not enough for her to see my expression. Despite that, she seemed to sense my displeasure. The closer she got to me, the more nervous she became until she paused, hesitating just out of reach. Her tiny hands clutched anxiously at the layers of fabric swathing her body.

I stepped towards her and she retreated, hands tightening defiantly. Her nervousness and fear called to the predator in me, making me aware of her as prey, setting off my instinct to hunt. Following her retreat, I backed her into the corner until she had nowhere left to go. Towering over her, she

glared at me through the darkness, tension tremoring through her. I reached for her and she stiffened in anticipation.

“Don’t,” she bit through her teeth.

“You don’t need those,” I replied calmly, grabbing her wrists. Futilely, she fought, trying to pull away from me with a mewl of angry frustration. Slowly, I raised her hands away from her torso until I could grasp both in one hand over her head. My free hand drifted back down her arm, skimming claws along her collarbone. She shivered, squirming to get away. Her skin sported new bruises from her fall down the hill. They decorated her flesh in dark blotches. Curling my fingers around the top of the towel and sheet, I gave a light tug, loosening them. My knuckles rested against her sternum between her breasts, holding the flimsy covering in place for a moment longer.

The little female groaned unhappily as she tugged uselessly at her arms. Her soft bosom jiggled prettily, brushing the sides of my hand. Unable to resist, I leaned in and nuzzled her neck with the side of my muzzle, breathing in her scent. She smelled sweet and earthy.

“No,” she snapped, pushing against me, trying to shove me away with her body. “You need to stop. I don’t want this. I don’t want you! Get off!”

“Maybe what you want doesn’t matter,” I stated threateningly.

“If that was true, you’d have raped me already,” she challenged. Her defiant attitude suddenly pissed me off.

Determined to show her who was in charge, I ripped the fabric downwards, yanking it off and letting it fall to the floor. The dark growling filled my head once more, craving violence and sex. She squawked furiously and shifted her weight. Her knee flew upwards, aiming for my groin.

Dodging the blow, I caught her leg under the knee, pulling her thigh up and around my hip. This exposed her sex and opened her body to me. In a swift move, I released her hands and grabbed her throat, shoving her harder against the wall, but not squeezing, not choking, just holding her there; showing her, I was the one in control. She stretched up on her tip

toes as I pressed closer, pinning her from hips to shoulders with my own body, my extruded dick trapped between us. Her bare skin was a silken heaven on my shaft.

“No!” She cried fearfully, tears rolling down her face. Her nails clawed desperately at the hand around her neck. I froze, the sight of her tears and the stink of her terror rooted me in place.

Chapter 33

Michelle

His course fur scratched along the soft skin of my inner thigh and I shivered in dread at what I knew was next. Terrified, I dug my nails into his wrist uselessly. If I could look down, I knew I'd see his penis sticking out from his body, I felt it pressing against my belly. Crying pitifully, I was unable to quell the panicked sobs heaving through my chest. He froze, motionless save for the stuttering spasms of his own uneven breathing.

Releasing his hold suddenly, I slipped, collapsing in a heap at his feet. The towel and sheet I snatched up, clenching them to my breasts as I huddled in a ball, trying to make myself as small as possible, desperately wishing I could block him out. Unfortunately, in my fear I was hyperaware of the monster standing above me.

"I…I don't…I'm not…" he stammered, unexpectedly sounding lost. Shaking his head as if to clear it, he shifted away from me just a little. I waited, silently holding my breath and praying. A snarl of rage bellowed out of him and he slammed his fist into the wall above me. Bits of plaster pelted me. Squeaking in fear, I scrambled around him, trying to get away.

A fist snagged in my hair and I froze, trembling as he pulled me up on my knees. He was semi-crouched behind and over me. Though nothing else touched me, his breath blew hot across my shoulder as he hovered over my naked, cowering body. I whimpered involuntarily and his grip on my hair tensed fractionally. I felt the shudder that traveled through him.

"Go back to your bed," he whispered roughly, abruptly releasing my hair. Moving cautiously, I willingly crawled back into the cage, grateful for the narrow escape. Dragging the sheet in with me, I wound the material tightly around my torso, refusing to look up at Beasty for fear of setting him off again.

Beasty watched me, his body tense, a barely restrained threat of violence in the air. After a moment, he bent down and reattached the panel, bending the sides together so hard they twisted out of shape. He stared

silently at me, chest heaving, hands gripped tightly in the cage wires. Finally releasing his hold, he turned and limped heavily out the door. Three of the wolf dogs trotted in and lay nearby, but I barely noticed and didn't care. A door slammed downstairs. I slumped shakily on my bed and shuddered, struggling to breathe evenly. What the fuck was that? What the hell had I been thinking? Provoking an unstable monster like him was practically suicide.

An enraged roar shook the windows, making me flinch. It didn't sound like he was right outside though. Beasty must have run off into the valley somewhere. He bellowed again and again and again until his voice broke on the last one. Silence reigned over the valley, everything waiting breathlessly for whatever came next.

A low howl, bitter and hard, broke the silence, rising on the wind. It lingered, turning mournful and sad as it went on almost endlessly. One by one the dogs joined him until a chorus of wretched voices rang through the night air in a sorrowful song. More howls followed, each one lonelier and more grief stricken than the last. Listening to those heartrending cries, my fear calmed and my shaking eased.

Beasty sounded so unhappy; they all did. I didn't know what to think. Despite what just happened and what had come before, I was starting to think that maybe he didn't want to hurt me at all. He didn't seem to have complete control of his impulses. Yeah, he'd scared the shit out of me several times, but he'd always backed off before he went too far. He'd also put up with my insults and saved my life. Assault was still assault and I wasn't ok with it, but even I could see there was more going on here.

I detested the things he'd done, how he made me feel so helpless all the time, and even he'd seemed horrified by what had almost happened. It was like there really were two different personalities fighting for dominance inside him. I hated being here and god knew how fucked up I was going to be if I ever got out, but listening to those painfilled cries was unsettling and confusing. They made me wonder if maybe I wasn't the only lost soul in the valley.

Exhaustion and stress claimed me once more and I slept fitfully for the rest of the night, my dreams fraught with nightmares of evil, glowing eyes and rough, clawed hands. I woke abruptly, tears on my face, and twitched uneasily at the sight of Beasty, crouched by the cage, watching me. He looked defeated. Shoulders slumping, he stood wearily and approached the cage. I drew back warily, retreating to the far end and pulling my limbs tight around me, waiting to see what he did.

Wordlessly, he opened cage and walked out, his steps heavy and his limp more pronounced than ever. A pile of clothes waited for me in the bathroom, complete with the underthings that had gone missing from my luggage. Still no shoes. I dressed, feeling like I was donning armor rather than just clothes, but the simple fact was, being fully dressed felt very comforting right now.

I paused in the doorway when I realized Beasty was back in the room. This time, he sat against the far wall near the balcony, leaving me the space nearest the bathroom and bedroom doors. A bowl of wild berries sat on top of the cage waiting for me. He waved towards it and then at the floor across from himself. Hesitantly, I picked it up and sat on the blankets in front of the cage. He watched me soundlessly, then heaved a great sigh.

“I am…not who I used to be,” he spoke, finally ending the unnervingly quiet atmosphere. I jumped, startled at his voice. It was gruff and raspy, broken from overuse. He grimaced at my reaction. “I don’t remember who or what I used to be, but I know I’m not him anymore. Frankly, I don’t even know what I am now. I don’t know what I used to look like or how long I’ve been here. I’m not entirely sure I was ever human. Time doesn’t feel the same for me. I can’t leave, I’ve tried, but I can’t seem to get out of this valley. I don’t know why though. I feel like I’ve always been here, but I remember things about humans that make me think I used to know them. Until recently though, I had stopped caring, if I ever cared about anything at all.

“I don’t think anything has truly mattered to me in a very long time. Part of me thinks I was a once man, but I’ve lived like an animal for as long as I can remember, and I liked it like that. Now that you are here though, it feels like there’s someone else stuck in my head and he wants

out. There's a fight going on inside me. This is the first time I've ever realized that something's not right with me. Before you came along, I couldn't…think too well, couldn't think like I was something that was more than a monster. Everything just rattled around in my head and got lost in a fog and all I could feel was anger and pain. I would lose days in a cloud of darkness, wake up covered in blood, and I liked it. I thrived on dominance and violence. It thrilled me to hunt something down and kill it with my bare hands, taste its blood in my mouth, feel it dying under me."

Chapter 34

Beasty

She listened mutely, food untouched in her hands, concern etching the lines of her face. That broke my heart. She was concerned…for me. I'd spent most of the last several days terrorizing her and after everything I'd done, she still had empathy for a creature like me. Last night had been the worst, I'd lost control, almost defiled my beautiful little bird, my pretty dancer. I would have destroyed her and, I think, myself.

When I left her behind, I'd raged at myself for hours. Screaming my fury and self-loathing until something in me broke. It was like a wall had come crashing down and I had a revelation. I couldn't touch her again. If I did, I might hurt her irreparably and that would destroy me.

"There is a horrible, selfish, violent…monster inside me," I said, continuing my story. "It wants to take and use and hurt you until there's nothing left of your sweetness and your spark." She drew her knees up defensively. "But now there's also this…other…this lost feeling inside, that sees you and wants to hold and shelter and shield you. To give you the love and protection you deserve, as best he can. The more he pushes the animal away, the stronger he gets, but there is so much darkness in me, I don't know if he can win. But you…you give me hope. With you, I remember things that were good and beautiful. Things that give me hope. I think that's why I kept the birds; they were a good thing that I could hold onto. Something that helped me cling to the last bit of my sanity and keep me from losing everything entirely." Michelle's eyes darted around the room and she grimaced guiltily.

"And I took that away from you," she muttered sadly.

"No. You saved them. Whether I realized it or not, they were dying and that was wrong. They did not deserve the fate I forced on them," I paused before I could include her in that sentence, but it hung unspoken in the air between us.

“My mother’s name was Margaret, but my dad called her Maggie. I don’t remember him, I don’t know if they’re alive, but I remember he called her Maggie. She loved Christmas and the Nutcracker and cookies. I can’t remember her face, but I know she had the biggest bosom you’ve ever seen,” I chuckled roughly. “When she hugged you, it was the softest, warmest hug and you’d feel like you were going to disappear in her cleavage. Those were the best hugs. I only remember all that because of you. Because you danced the Nutcracker for me. Somehow, you calmed the chaos in my head long enough for that memory to break through and I remembered her. You’re so soft and sweet, you remind me of good things. Things I think I enjoyed once upon a time.

“I need you, more than you know. I don’t know who is going to be more in control from day to day and it scares me. I don’t want to hurt you. Losing you would likely destroy me. I know that this whole mess is wrong, it’s so very wrong to keep you here, but I…I can’t let you go. I hope one day you can find it in your heart to forgive me.” She sat there, gaping in astonishment at my announcement. Her mouth opened and closed as she tried to find the words she wanted. Before she could act or speak on the anger that formed in her expression, I got up and vaulted over the railing, retreating, running from her hurt at the unfairness of it all.

Chapter 35

Michelle

They did not deserve the fate I forced on them…so very wrong…I can't let you go…forgive me… Those words rang in my head and I could only sit numbly and watch him disappear out the doors. That selfish brute knew that keeping me was wrong, he knew that he almost hurt me, and he still wouldn't let me go.

"Wait!!" I yelled, jumping up and rushing to the railing. "That's not fair!" Too late, he'd vanished into the sunlit valley. No telling when he'd come back, but when he did, I had some words for him! Footsteps behind me gave me a start and I whipped around quickly.

"Oh! It's just you guys," I said, relieved to see a pair of the big wolf dogs walk in. Thankfully, the mean bitch, Shayla, didn't come around much. There was something very wrong with that one. "Let's go downstairs, shall we?" I stated, heading for the door. In a blink, both animals were blocking the exit. Neither one growled or threatened me, but their body language said loud and clear that I wasn't allowed to leave the room. "Seriously?" The bigger of the pair woofed an affirmative sound and nudged the door shut with his nose.

So, I'm under house arrest huh? I thought peevishly. *We'll see about that.* Nonchalantly, I strolled into the bathroom, intending to leave through the other room, only to find the broken door wedged into place and barricaded from the other side. Pissed off now, I marched back to the main door, which both canines were now flopped in front of, and tried to push them out of my way. Unfortunately, they went completely limp and turned into a couple hundred pounds of dead weight. They were too heavy to move individually, much less together. Growling in frustration, I stomped towards the balcony, determined to make my exit any way I could.

Apparently sensing my plan, I suddenly found myself yanked backwards by my shirt tail, landing hard on my butt. Before I could get up, a huge furry body planted itself in my lap and knocked me flat.

“Oof,” I grunted as what had to be two hundred pounds of massive black dog pinned me to the hard floor. Cursing, I pushed uselessly at the animal until ultimately giving up with a huff of exasperation. “Okay, okay, I give up. You win, I’ll stay put,” I wheezed. The dog shifted to look at my face and huffed at me. “Pinkie swear, I’ll stop trying to leave this room,” I promised, crooking a pinkie at him. He licked my hand, curling his tongue around my finger in the strangest, wettest pinkie promise ever. Then he stood up and gave me a stern look that suggested he intended to hold me to it.

“Asshole,” I griped, swiping dog hair off my clothes. “What am I supposed to do all day in here?” His only response was to yawn hugely, flop on the floor, and lick his balls. “That’s super helpful,” I drawled sarcastically.

Hours passed. I finished off my breakfast sometime around midday, paced restlessly, tried to concentrate on yoga and failed, and groaned dramatically several times. An attempt to dismantle the cage bombed miserably. Beasty put it together with wires so thick I couldn’t unbend any of them by myself. I just ended up cutting my fingers again. Finding the first aid kit, I cleaned the cuts on my hands and bandaged them. Then took care of the poorly bandaged cut over my eye.

The canines were singularly unimpressed by my antics and spent most of the day sleeping or pretending to ignore me. One stayed in front of the bedroom door while the other stayed near the balcony so I wouldn’t try to leave again. Occasionally they stretched and swapped stations, but even they started to look a bit bored as the day went on.

Midafternoon, I caught the scent of woodsmoke from outside. I wasn’t allowed near the balcony, so I couldn’t look to see where it came from. The smell of roasting meat soon followed and my stomach rumbled, reminding me that I hadn’t eaten much today. This odd, infrequent diet I was on was going to affect me eventually, I realized glumly, wondering how much weight I’d lost already. I was slender to begin with because of my profession, I couldn’t afford to lose more than a couple pounds before I started to suffer adverse effects.

Finally, I heard the thud of heavy steps outside the door and the animal stationed there got up and moved out of the way. Beasty shouldered the door open, hands full with a tray of cooked meat and foraged plants. He at least had a decent working knowledge of edible plants so I wasn't being subjected to an all protein diet. I, however, knew nothing about survival. I'd have been lost, not knowing how to hunt or forage for myself.

"Hey. I need to get out of this room," I said calmly, not moving towards him. Saying nothing, he placed the tray on the cage and turned to leave. "Wait just a god damn minute!" I exclaimed. He paused expectantly. "You can't keep me in here all day! I'm gonna go stir crazy in no time with nothing to do!"

"Sleep in your bed tonight," he replied, pointing at the cage and ignoring my complaint.

"No! I'm not a poodle you can leave penned up all day and then kennel at night, Beasty. I can't live like this," I protested, stomping my foot crossly.

"You will sleep in the cage!" He snarled loudly, finally cutting his eyes over to glare at me. "Do not defy me! I do not think it would end well." He slammed the door shut on his warning and stomped away noisily.

"Fuck," I grumbled. A wet nose shoved into my palm, startling me a little. Looking down, I saw that Carol had come in at some point while I bitched at Beasty. Absentmindedly, I scratched at her ears.

Groaning happily, she leaned into my legs. I grabbed the tray and sat near the balcony with a sigh. The big male lay across the door, but I could still look out and feel the breeze. I picked at the meat, not knowing what it was. The tray held a decent sized portion of meat that looked like it had once been a four-legged mammal of some kind. Maybe it was rabbit. I hoped it was rabbit. I didn't think I'd like to know if it was possum or raccoon.

The greens appeared to be mostly dandelion leaves and some other wide green leaf I couldn't identify. Under the leaves, there were more of those tart red berries from the first morning I'd woken up here, and a

couple of mushrooms. I assumed they must be edible since Beasty brought them and he wanted me alive and well, but I'd always heard you shouldn't really trust wild mushrooms.

"These any good?" I asked, holding one out to Carol. She obligingly sniffed it, but curled her lip and nose in a twist of disgust before sneezing loudly and pawing at her face.

"Well that's not reassuring at all," I commented dryly, eyeing the now suspicious fungi. The big male huffed an amused sound, walked over, and ate the mushroom without even sniffing it. Plopping back on the floor with a bored yawn, he ignored Carol's look of revulsion.

"Oh," I stated as comprehension dawned on me. "Don't like mushrooms huh?" Carol sneezed again, shaking her head and gagging expressively. I laughed and bit into the remaining mushroom. It had an earthy flavor but wasn't bad. It actually went well with the berries and slightly charred meat. At least it wasn't completely burned this time, Beasty was slowly getting better at camp cooking.

What I couldn't eat got fed to the dogs who happily crunched it down, bones and all. It was kind of cloudy outside which meant little to no moonlight once the sun went down tonight. With that in mind, I went ahead and cleaned up, washing my face and hands, then using the toilet before the light faded. I might be stuck in here, but damned if I was going to smell bad.

With nothing else to do, I watched the sun set until the sky and room were fully dark, then crawled gloomily into the cage. I did drag one of the heavier blankets from Beasty's bedding in with me and wrapped up in it before settling down to sleep. It took a while, and I tossed and turned restlessly for what felt like hours, but I finally drifted off, looking forward to seeing Logan again.

Chapter 36

Beasty

I stayed away all day, save for the few minutes it took to feed my female. It had taken all my self-control to leave the room last night, when I wanted nothing more than to force her submission once more. I was tense and on edge. It made me cranky and short tempered. I wasn't ready to trust myself around her just yet. She was too tempting to the beast, too vulnerable in general.

I spent the day roaming the valley, circling the cabin again and again. My steps always brought me back to the cabin door, where I faltered each time. My fingers pulled at the charm around my neck, clutching it obsessively. The growling was there in my mind, a dull grating buzz that itched at my nerves until I was ready to snap. That was why I ordered her to sleep in her cage. It would be safer for her if I didn't have immediate access, I hoped.

Crouching in the tree line, I watched her windows. It was silly. There was no power for lights. No way to really know just when she put herself to bed. No way to know if she was asleep yet. I simply sat in the dark and stared at her room, rubbing my ballerina pendant since it was the only way I could safely to touch her.

The rain that had been threatening to fall all day, finally arrived, driving me into the cabin before I could get more than a little wet. It was late, the sun had set a long time ago. Surely she was asleep by now. As quietly as possible, I climbed the stairs and listened at her door. The room was silent, so I eased the door open. Danny and Eric raised their heads and looked at me. I jerked my head towards the door and they padded out noiselessly.

Turning to the cage, I caught the glitter of eyes as Carol peered out at me. She was curled against Little Bird and would not be able to get out without waking the girl. Probably for the best. I stooped in front of the pen and stared longingly at my female.

She slept fitfully, her face pinched and drawn from whatever unpleasantness haunted her dreams. She'd stolen one of my blankets and cocooned herself in it in such a way that it would be impossible to remove easily. One arm thrust out of the covers and draped over Carol's body in a sleepy snuggle that I envied. Her hand lay against the side of the wire lattice between us.

Unable to fully resist the urge to touch her, I stroked the tiny bit of skin I could reach. My poor, pretty bird was so distressingly soft. One day I would hurt her. It was a question of when, not if. I should let her go. I should take her to the edge of my territory and point her in the direction of freedom. But selfishly, I knew it was impossible. I knew I couldn't free my little bird.

A cool breeze flowed through the open windows and she shivered, pulling her arm under the cover and burrowing into Carol's warmth. I got up and draped the remaining blankets over the top of the cage, shutting out the cold save for a gap that allowed me to continue watching her as she slept.

The simple act of covering the cage reminded me of other chilly nights. Images popped in and out of my head in flashes of color and sensation. Knee deep snow, driving blizzards, covered cages, frozen birds. I struggled to process the sudden barrage. Winter was harsher than I'd recalled if my new memories were accurate.

I would need to secure a warmer place for my female. The storeroom was less drafty. Perhaps it would be easier to keep that room warm. If I vented the smoke somehow, I could heat the room with a small fire in that little barbeque grill outside.

Plans and ideas ran through my thoughts as I sat there, staring at the girl through the gap in the covers. I was so absorbed in my musings, that I didn't notice the passage of time until a ray of early morning sunshine snaked across the floor and touched the edge of the cage. Quietly getting up, I crept out and limped down the stairs.

Chapter 37

Michelle

I didn't sleep worth shit. Exhausted and sore from lying still too long, I watched Beasty shuffle out and shut the door. It had been rather sweet of him to cover the cage. Between my body heat and Carol's, it had been nice and warm in the little cave he'd made with the extra blankets. I'd actually been awake for a while, just watching him from under my lashes. He seemed overly quiet and more disturbed than usual.

For the moment it was just me and Carol in the room, so I crawled out and hurriedly used the bathroom. After splashing a bit of water on my face and quickly quenching my thirst, I headed for the door. Just as I reached for the knob however, Carol inserted her body in the way, blocking me. Her dark solemn gaze looked up apologetically when I groaned irritably.

"Not you too," I groused. Carol whined low in her throat and leaned into my legs, pushing me away from the door. "Seriously? Sweetie, I need out of here," I complained, just as the door opened.

"The pack obeys me and no one else or they risk punishment. Carol knows this. You will learn as well," Beasty commented flatly. His hairy hulking body seemed more bent and twisted than before as he limped heavily into the room.

"What's wrong with you?" I asked, watching him with concern.

"Nothing," he mumbled crossly. Dropping a bundle of items and another bowl of fruit on the cage, he turned and left without looking at me. As he walked out, two more of his dogs trotted in and Carol slipped out on his heels. It was a little hard to tell, but these two looked different from the two that babysat me the previous day. Both of them flopped in the middle of the room and stared at me expectantly.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know the rules. Stay in the room, don't try to leave, and stay away from the windows," I snapped aggravatedly. They

both snorted in amusement, then settled down and proceeded to ‘ignore’ me. If only they really would, then maybe I could slip outside for some air.

I ate a handful of berries, but the repetitive options were boring me and I saved most of it for later when I actually got hungry enough to no longer care. The bundle turned out to be a change of clothes, my shampoo, and one of the two books I’d had in my bag. Saving the clothes for later, I happily sat down with the book. Trying to read slowly was hard, but I wanted the book to last as long as possible.

Hours passed quietly, broken only by random noises from outside. Wild berries for breakfast and lunch was getting old so I only nibbled at the food as the day went on. The dogs napped or wandered the room restlessly, peering out the windows longingly from time to time. One of them ambled over and threw himself across my legs with a cranky mutter.

“Bored huh?” I observed dryly, setting the book aside. He grunted in agreement and sighed heavily. “Now you know how I feel.” He snorted a reply and kicked out a foot, hitting my book. “Just because I have a book now doesn’t make it any less boring being stuck in here all day, every day, day after day,” I answered snarkily. His eyes rolled so hard I actually wondered if it hurt. “Smart ass,” I whispered, scratching his ear.

Grumbling delightedly, he rolled over and offered his underside. Obligingly, I gave him a belly rub. Whining expectantly, the other canine threw himself down beside me and demanded his own tummy scratches. With nothing else to do, I indulged him as well. Soon, both animals were wiggling in my lap and making happy sounds as I laughed at their antics.

“Hey! I have an idea,” I announced suddenly. Pushing them off, I grabbed the socks out of the clothes Beasty had left for me. Balling one up, I stuffed it inside the other and rolled the whole thing into a vaguely round shape before flipping the cuff over to secure it. “Who wants to play catch?” Two sets of ears perked up eagerly, but the bigger of the two sniffed disdainfully and turned up his nose.

“Oh, is that how it is? You’re too good to play ball huh? No worries, I don’t need you. Balto here wants to play, don’tcha boy?” I teased, turning to the obviously younger dog who was wagging his tail and bouncing in place. He barked and spun in a circle.

The room was much too small for a proper game of catch and the sock ball didn't bounce at all, but it was still fun to throw the balled-up socks for the dog to chase and catch. I faked him out a couple times and he'd whine sheepishly at my laughter. Despite the lack of bounce, I managed to throw the ball in such a way that he occasionally lost his footing and skittered noisily across the floor.

One misstep caused him to crash into the other dog who had been watching us surreptitiously. The bigger fellow jumped up, flipping the smaller one off his back, and stole the sock ball. A short-lived, but hysterical chase ensued and I was forced to retreat to the bathroom door or get run over. The battle for the toy ended in a wrestling match in the middle of the floor that left my socks ruined and both animals panting merrily.

"See, I knew you weren't too good to play with us, Otis," I smirked, reaching down to scratch the big dog's ear again. Darting upwards, he surprised me with a wet, drooly swipe of his tongue across my face. "Oh! Ew! Blech!" I yelped, jerking back and falling on my ass.

Immediately, the dogs pounced, knocking me flat and licking my face and arms repeatedly. Too big to push away, I went down in a giggling, shrieking heap underneath huge paws and soggy tongues.

"No! Ack! Stop it!" I cried, laughing helplessly. The door slammed open, startling all of us.

A deep angry snarl filled the air. The dogs immediately slunk off me, cowering on the floor. The snarl deepened. Very carefully, both canines rolled to their backs, exposing necks and bellies to Beasty's rage. Free of the dogs, I could see Beasty in the doorway, half crouched and bristled menacingly, poised to strike at the prostrated animals.

"Hey," I spoke calmly, cautiously rising to stand. His razor-sharp focus snapped to my eyes and I saw a storm of emotion cross his face, anger, worry, jealousy, even fear. "It's ok, I'm fine," I said reassuringly. He whined under his breath, the worry returning. Stepping towards him, I was surprised when nervousness replaced the worry and his ears tilted back warily. "What's wrong Beasty? What's got you all riled up?" Whining again, he shook his head and pulled himself a little straighter. When he

looked at me once more, his expression was a little clearer if not any saner.

“You are not hurt?” He asked in a low voice, eyeing the still limp wolf dogs behind me.

“I’m fine,” I stated, stepping closer to Beasty and blocking his view of the dogs so he’d focus on me again. “We were just playing. I’m fine,” I repeated. Beasty’s eyes flashed with jealously and he growled again.

“No, now you stop that!” I scolded. “You can’t shut me, or them, into a single room day and night, then expect us to not get bored! If we find a way to pass the time and have a little fun, without you, you can’t say shit about it,” I retorted waspishly.

“I gave you a book,” he huffed.

“A book is only good for an hour or two at best, more if it’s really good or you’re desperate to relieve the monotony, but it won’t keep me entertained all day. I need to get up, I need to move. I need sunlight and fresh air and grass under my feet,” I replied crossly. The sides of his muzzle pulled down in a frown, but he said nothing more. “Come on. Let me out. Let them out. They can run around a bit. We can all stretch our legs and enjoy the afternoon,” I wheedled. “I’ll even dance if you want.” His gaze turned hungry, needy, at my offer, but it didn’t work the way I wanted.

“Dance here,” he ordered roughly, his hand coming up to pull at the fur around his neck.

“I can’t, this room is too small,” I protested, only a little dishonestly. I could have used the room, but I was hoping Beasty’s desire to see me dance would drive him to take me outside or, at the very least, downstairs. Beasty grunted unintelligibly, turned, and walked out, shutting the door firmly behind him.

“Damn,” I cursed under my breath. Returning to my previous seat, I slid down the wall, blinking back frustrated tears. The two dogs immediately crawled into my lap seeking reassurance. “Sorry guys,” I shrugged, petting them softly. “I tried.”

Chapter 38

Beasty

The girl's shriek had nearly destroyed the tenuous hold I had on my self-control. I'd raced up the stairs, ready to defend her from an unknown threat, only to find her playing with Eric and Robert. Jealousy sunk its ugly, murderous talons, into me and I'd wanted nothing more than to destroy them both. And fuck the consequences. Then, she offered to dance, *she offered*. I almost caved right there. I almost gave in and let her escape the safety of the room. I couldn't though. There had to be boundaries, there had to be limits. The cost of losing control were dire. I'd been too relaxed before. Too willing to keep her close, to give her some small freedom. I couldn't risk it; I couldn't lose her.

Carol had been the one to catch dinner for my female today, bringing me another fat rabbit. This time I stuffed the carcass with the mushrooms and wild garlic I'd found during my foraging. Some part of me remembered enjoying a similar meal. My mind wandered as I watched it cook.

Another flash of memory assailed me. A campfire, laughing friends, a humid tropical breeze. It faded too quickly to catch any of the fine details. Frustrated, I threw another log on the fire. Belatedly, I realized this would make the fire hotter and likely burn the rabbit. Carefully rolling it aside, I winced at the pain that pulsed through my body. The few days of relief I'd experienced with Little Bird had made me forget just how badly I'd hurt before she came.

Once the meat was done, I carried it upstairs. The girl was standing near the window, looking out. Glancing irritably at me, she said nothing and went back to staring sulkily out at the trees. I set the tray down and turned to leave.

"Sleep in your cage," I mumbled. She huffed irately.

"What's wrong with you Beasty?" She asked as I reached the door. Her voice was calm and mildly concerned. I didn't, couldn't, look at her.

“Nothing,” I replied again. I paused, sighing. “Everything,” I added, tapping the side of my head before closing the door behind me.

Eric and Robert trotted down the stairs, studiously avoiding me while they made their way out into the valley. Danny and Mike had swapped with them while I was talking to my female. Carol may have followed me in as well but I couldn’t remember seeing her. A loud growl of feminine frustration carried through the thin walls and I felt a glimmer of amusement. The buzz in my skull sharpened, drowning it out. Shaking my head, I stumbled outside and sat under the balcony.

Experiencing an odd sense of déjà vu, I listened to her chatter at the animals keeping her company as she ate, sharing both her food and her life with them. An only child, her father had passed away when she was very young. A failed ballerina, her mother lived vicariously through her daughter’s not quite stellar career. Always pushing her to train more, do better, try harder, certain in her conviction that Little Bird wasn’t doing everything she could to be the Prima Ballerina. I snorted at that, even I knew that no matter how good a dancer she was, my little female would never have the stature that directors looked for when casting their leading ladies.

“I thought moving more than an hour away from her would have curbed some of her enthusiasm. Gawd, was I wrong. Despite the distance, she still shows up at the crack of dawn to make sure I get at least an hour’s worth of practice before breakfast,” Little Bird’s voice raised a bit as she expressed her frustration to her companions. Then she spoke of her friend Dylan and I grew jealous of the love in her voice. Was he the male in the picture on her phone?

“His parents support whatever he wants to do with his life. They just want to him to be happy. Why can’t my mom be like that?” Little Bird’s voice was sad now. “I got an email from a ballet company in another state. Part of me wonders if I should accept their offer,” she said wistfully. “I’d be leaving my friends and it’s not even a leading position in the troupe either, but I could move to that state and maybe escape my mom. Especially if I don’t tell her where I’m going. At the same time though, I’m not sure I want to continue in a company at all.” My little dancer

wanted to quit? No, she was too good, too talented to give up her dancing. She loved it too much. The thought of her quitting made me both angry and sad.

“I don’t know,” she continued. “I don’t want to quit, but I just don’t feel like the company is a good fit for me anymore. And now I’m stuck here,” she ended crossly. I heard the rustle of cloth and footsteps moving away from the window.

The sound of the shower turning on made me groan and I felt myself responding as I pictured her wet and naked in the little bathroom. Simple imagining turned into lewd fantasy once again as I visualized her stepping out of the shower and into my arms. My cock extruded and I fisted it as I imagined laying her down and burying my tongue in her slit. Licking her to orgasm, I would thrust into her still quivering body and rut myself to satisfaction. With that vision in mind, I stroked myself hard and fast until I came, clenching my jaw shut and spilling my seed in the grass under her windows.

Spasms of pain wracked me and I fell to the ground, twitching and gasping in agony. Shayla appeared in my peripheral vision. She eyed me unsympathetically before kicking a pawful of dirt at me with a disgusted snarl. Leaving me to my misery, the contrary beast strolled over, pissed on the basket of food I’d foraged for Little Bird, and trotted off into the woods once more.

“I’m gonna kill that bitch,” I grumbled as I finally regained some control over my muscles.

Stumbling to my feet, I dragged the ruined food away from the cabin and dumped the entire basket in the tree line. It wasn’t hard to find edibles for my female right now, but it was tedious and taxing on me to search the entire valley for a variety. Shayla had already disappeared, but I knew she’d be back. I would deal with her then. It was too late to forage for more before dark, I would have to go in the morning.

Waiting until long after nightfall, I finally crept into the bedroom to check on my dancer. The girl was wrapped in her blankets and snuggled with Carol again, though she didn’t appear to be sleeping well. Fidgeting and mumbling incoherently, she shifted restlessly in her sleep. One hand

reached out, grasping at the cage wires and she whimpered in distress. Slowly, I stroked her fingers with the back of my knuckles. Amazingly, her soft cries quieted and she slipped into a deeper, calmer sleep.

The night waned while I watched her. Some of her initial agitation returned, but not as badly and she settled each time I touched her hand. There was a voice in my head urging me to drag her out and take what I wanted. It made me afraid. Fearing it would take over if I let go, I struggled to stay awake. The predawn gloom soon lightened the sky and I retreated from the room. I needed to find food for my female now anyways.

Chapter 39

Michelle

The floor creaked slightly when he stood up, but I'd have sworn the sound came from Beasty himself. His movements were so stiff and pained, I was surprised he could get up at all. His eyes were exhausted and heavy lidded and I knew from watching his head droop for at least the last hour that he was fighting sleep. When had he last slept, I wondered?

Quickly, crawling out and using the bathroom, I was surprised when he didn't show up with my morning meal soon after I finished. I was used to him being there with a bowl of wild berries, but he was a bit slower today apparently. It took me a moment to realize the dogs were gone too. I was alone for the first time in a long time. Had he decided to let me out? Or had he simply forgotten?

Curious, I tried the door handle and was delighted when the door opened on to an empty hallway. No one stopped me at the stairs and I made it all the way down before spotting one of the dogs. The biggest of the males lay across the cabin entry watching me with a stern expression. He gave a firm huff at my approach.

"No going outside huh?" I commented, he huffed again in agreement. "At least I am out of that room," I stated with a shrug.

The storeroom stood open, so I ducked in and found most of my bed was missing, probably stripped for my new sleeping arrangements upstairs. My luggage was spilled and obviously rifled through. Sighing, I refolded my clothes, smoothing the wrinkles and neatly repacked the cases. Making two trips, I carried the bags up, then a number of other supplies, such as a lantern, extra batteries, and some snacks, and stored it all in the room where I could get to them easily.

Out of boredom, I grabbed the broom and started sweeping the front room again. It was still a million times cleaner than it had been before I threw all the broken furniture and trash out, but Beasty and the dogs had obviously tracked leaves, debris, and muddy pawprints everywhere while

I'd been locked upstairs. That and Beasty had apparently thrown dirt over the puddle of turkey blood to soak it up. The big canine in the doorway moved over so I could sweep the filth out, after shooting me a warning glare of course.

I swept longer than I needed to, simply enjoying the work and the act of being in motion. Short hard swipes turned into long sweeping strokes. Those evolved into dips and turns. Pirouettes and jetes soon followed and I skipped lightly around the room with my broom partner.

Between one turn and the next, I noticed Beasty standing in the doorway watching me. He wore the same hungry, longing look I always saw when I caught him staring, but this time it was stark, needy, desperate even. There was a sadness there, instead of the usual angry, aggressive possessiveness I was used to. Hands twitched with the desire to reach out and grab me as I swept by, I was surprised when he shut his eyes, took a deep breath, and turned away. Leaving his basket inside the doorframe, Beasty went back outside without a word. I slowed my twisting and stopped as I eyed the opening, wondering if he was alright, if he was coming back. Then I realized…I wanted him to come back.

"I'm as crazy as he is," I muttered, shaking my head.

The lack of decent sleep and the isolation must be getting to me. I must be developing some form of Stockholm syndrome to suddenly be empathizing with my captor. What little sleep I managed to get was disturbed by nightmares of endless cabin hallways, shadowy forest paths, and running from red eyed monsters in the dark. Logan was nowhere to be found and I worried about him. I refused to believe he was just a figment of my dreams, he was too real, too detailed and I couldn't give up on him. Without Logan it was just me and Beasty and I wasn't sure I could handle that. So, I worried. Where was he? Was he okay? Safe?

Feeling a little bummed, I went back to sweeping normally and eventually swept most of the lower level and stairs before quitting. Curiosity and hunger had me investigating the contents of the basket by the door. It contained the usual berries and greens as well as an unfamiliar item that looked like a fat lumpy root. Unimpressed with the same food

over and over, but not hungry enough to open an MRE, I settled for a handful of berries and sat where I could look out the door while I snacked.

A chilly breeze blew through the cabin and I shivered despite the sunshine. Movement in the tree line across the clearing caught my attention. The brush parted, revealing Shayla glaring at me with her crazy red eyes. I shuddered at the intensity of her stare. Lip curling, she flashed shiny white fangs at me, then slid back into the shadows once more. A chill ran down my spine. I shook myself suddenly, feeling like I'd been released from a spell that kept me paralyzed. The male lying next to me looked up at my movement, cocking his head questioningly.

"Did you see that?" I asked pointing at the trees. He glanced in that direction, but looked at me again in confusion. "I thought I saw Shayla. She looked…odd," I explained. That got his attention. Tensing slightly, he got up and trotted out to investigate. I stood as he left. Stopping, he turned and gave a low bark of warning.

"Yeah, I'll stay right here," I assured him. Satisfied, he went back to his investigation.

Watching closely as he sniffed along the edge of the woods, I just barely caught the movement in my peripheral vision. Cautiously turning my head, a fraction to the right, I spotted the low-slung body of the feline as it slunk along the side of the house towards me. It was a lynx. I'd only ever seen one on tv.

The cat had thick brown and grey fur. Sharp black hairs jutted out in tufts from its ears. Huge feet padded silently along the dirt. Its eyes glowed that same eerie red I'd seen in Shayla's eyes and it was entirely focused on me. Moving in a half crouch against the side of the house, it crept soundlessly towards me, fangs bared, fur standing on end.

"Um…Fido?" I called uneasily. The dog turned towards me just as the lynx sprang into motion. I yelped fearfully when it lunged at me, jaws wide and claws extended.

Dodging, I threw myself out of the doorway and into the clearing where I'd have room to move and it wouldn't be able to corner me as easily. The stocky feline hissed angrily and spun in pursuit. My wolf-dog

guardian leaped after it. Barking angrily, he chased it, but the cat was smaller, faster, and much more agile. The feline easily evaded him before pivoting to charge at me again. Razor sharp claws left stinging streaks of fire down my left hip as I dove out of reach too slowly.

“Shit!” I squawked, tripping and landing on my hip. The lynx turned and attacked once more, leaping for my face. I screamed, rolling back and wrapping my arms over my head.

A roar of rage and a shadow fell over me. Blinking rapidly, I found myself looking up at Beasty’s torso. He stood protectively over me, the yowling, spitting cat clutched in his hands. It squirmed and tore into his skin with its claws.

Growling fiercely, Beasty flexed his hands and the cat screeched, then fell silent as its air was cut off. It fought harder, raking its hind feet down Beasty’s arm. Slinging the animal away with another roar, I watched wide eyed as it slammed into the side of the cabin with the crunch of breaking bones. Limp and lifeless it fell to the grass and lay there. One of the dogs grabbed it by the scruff and dragged it away.

Beasty watched tensely, still crouched over me. Blood dripped from his wounds, some of it landing on me. I stayed still and quiet, worried that drawing his attention could cause a repeat of that day in the woods.

Finally, once the carcass was out of sight, some of the tension flowed out of his frame and he drooped tiredly. Looking down at me, his eyes were worried. His gaze still so sad and uncertain. He looked completely exhausted. Squatting slowly, I was stunned when he lifted me up and gathered me against his chest in a hug that was obviously more for his comfort than mine.

Chapter 40

Beasty

Yet another animal in my valley had attacked my little bird. Why was this happening? They'd never come so close to the cabin before. I held her tightly enough to feel her breath ruffle my fur. Calmly accepting my embrace, she sat on the ground as I knelt over her body and clutched her to me. Soft hands fluttered awkwardly as she patted my arm reassuringly. I trembled at the feel and squeezed her just a little tighter.

Despite Danny's efforts, the lynx could have seriously injured my female. It had scared me to see the little beast doing its damnedest to get to her. Inhaling deeply, I breathed her into my lungs. Her fear smell was fading and I was distressed by the odor of blood that tainted her sweet scent.

"You are injured," I stated, pulling away abruptly. I sucked in an alarmed gasp at the amount of blood on her face and clothing.

Scooping her up quickly, I charged into the cabin. She squeaked at the sudden motion and grabbed at my neck anxiously. It actually felt good to have her hold on to me, despite the reason. I stumbled up the stairs to the bathroom and sat her on the toilet so I could tear open the cabinet. Shaking terribly as I searched, I almost couldn't hear her calling my name.

"Beasty! Beasty, stop!" She raised her voice. I snapped my eyes to meet hers.

"I have to find the first aid kit," I replied urgently.

"I'm okay, Beasty," she said softly.

"The blood…you're…you're not okay," I stated shakily.

"Most of it is yours," she answered. Then she shocked me entirely by putting her hand on the side of my muzzle and turning my face to look at her again. "Most of it is yours," she repeated gently. "I'm okay, but you are injured. Let me clean you up, okay?"

"No, no, I have to see to you first," I stuttered.

Sighing, Little Bird, my defiant, angry, forceful Little Bird, grabbed the tail of her bloody shirt and pulled it off over her head. Using the dirty top to wipe her face clean, she scrubbed the blood from her skin. When she finished, she proceeded to strip her torn leggings off as well.

“There, see? Everything is fine,” my beautiful little female stood naked and willingly exposed to me, turning so I could see all of her. Three angry red scratches on her hip were the only injuries she’d sustained and they had already stopped bleeding. “Now, will you please let me patch you up? You’re bleeding all over the bathroom.”

“Will you stay like that?” I asked, staring hungrily. She looked uncomfortable, but resigned.

“Fine,” she huffed. “But only till we’re done and only if you behave yourself,” she agreed sternly. I nodded eagerly, fisting my hands close to my body so I wouldn’t grab at her. She retrieved the first aid kit from an old shelf over the toilet.

At her urging, I sat on my haunches and held out one arm, then the other. The bathroom was so small, my back leaned against the wall while my knees jutted out on either side of Little Bird where she stood in front of the sink. It would take no effort to pull her into my arms. Very gently, she cleaned the wounds with an antiseptic, smeared antibiotic ointment on each one, and wrapped clean gauze around each hand and lower arm. Her touch was soothing on my frayed nerves.

“I look like what happens when the wolfman fucks the mummy,” I quipped when she finished, examining my bandage clad arms. She gaped at me.

“Was that another joke? Good lord, Beasty. I didn’t think you had it in you,” she gave a short laugh that jiggled her bosom and had me eyeing her gorgeous naked tits once more. “Alright, time to dress,” she announced, seeing where my attention had gone.

“First, your wound needs tending,” I insisted. Carefully pushing her to sit on the toilet again, I made her turn to the side so I could see her hip. She sat still while I cleaned the scratches and taped a gauze pad over them. A brief fight with the tape had her giggling as she helped untangle me.

This was the first time we'd spent time together and it hadn't turned into some kind of disaster. It was nice, but it couldn't last. I needed to leave before I lost control again.

"Dress, then stay in your room were it's safer," I ordered brusquely, standing to go. Another shock coursed through me when she grabbed my hand to stop me.

"Stay with me Beasty. Please?" I met her soft, pleading gaze.

"I can't. I might hurt you next time," I said softly, reluctant to pull my hand free.

"Just lay with me till I fall asleep then? I'm scared to be alone," she cajoled sweetly. I found I could deny her nothing in that moment.

"Ok, but only until you fall asleep," I acquiesced hesitantly. She smiled and moved around me.

After pulling on a pair of panties and a long t-shirt, she dragged the loose bedding out of the cage and rearranged the bed I'd left on the floor days ago. Patting the bedding beside her, she urged me to lay on my side. Then she spooned into me and pulled my arm around her waist. Gladly, I held her close and sighed as some of my pain melted away at her touch.

"Thank you, Beasty," she whispered.

I licked the back of her ear in reply, then snuffled her hair contentedly. I missed this. She shivered briefly, then began patting a steady, even rhythm on my arm. A quiet humming rose from her, some sweet, soothing tune to accompany the patting. My eyes drooped and my limbs felt heavy. Groggily, I realized what she was doing, but it was too late. I was so damn tired and she felt so good against me. Between my exhaustion, the comfort of her warmth, the steady pat of her hand, and her humming, I was soon lost in the arms of sleep.

Chapter 41

Michelle

I was taking a hell of a risk by asking him to stay, but it was for entirely selfish reasons, or so I told myself. He was practically a zombie. What if I got attacked again? Beasty couldn't protect me if he was too tired to stand. And I wasn't safe from him if he was too tired to control himself. Until I got out of this mess, he had to stay healthy. So, I hummed a lullaby and patted his arm like my mom had done for me when she would soothe me to sleep as a little girl, before she became such a training obsessive ballet coach.

I sensed the moment he gave in. Body relaxing fully, his arm tightened, pulling me closer into the curve of his chest. He mumbled a contented, sleepy noise and snuffled my hair with a sigh.

Releasing a sigh of my own, I lay listening to him breathe and wondering what exactly I was doing. Was it really out of self-preservation that I wanted him to sleep? Or did I actually care about the scary beast man? The last few days he'd seemed so…haunted. His moods swung so wildly from scary to sweet to tragic and back again, it made my head spin. Sighing again, I shifted a bit to get more comfortable and closed my eyes. It was only late morning, but we were both already so tired.

A soft kiss woke me. I blinked, opening my eyes to focus on the face above me. Logan's gorgeous green eyes crinkled happily at me.

"Welcome back, Tiny Dancer," he whispered. I threw my arms around his neck.

"Logan! Oh God, Logan! Where have you been!?" I cried, holding him close. His arms clung just as tightly.

"I don't know, love. I feel like I was lost or something. I couldn't find my way back to you. Are you alright?" He answered, hands skimming a comforting pattern over my back.

"I am now," I said, burrowing into his warm chest.

A breeze ruffled my hair and I looked around without letting him go. We sat on a blanket under a bright, spring green willow tree. Wildflowers bloomed all around us and flowed down the sides of the hill the tree grew from. Pastureland spread out from there, dotted with cattle and trees. A deep, blue river cut across the land and a city on the far side covered the landscape in the distance, disappearing over the horizon.

"Where are we?" I asked, peering up at Logan.

"Spain somewhere," he answered with a shrug.

"It's beautiful," I sighed, leaning into him.

"I've missed you," he stated, his hand curving under my chin and tilting my head up. My world shrank to just the two of us as I met his gaze. He had heated, hungry eyes as he stared down at me.

Surging upwards in his arms, I kissed him, hard. Nearly drowning in his taste, his equally fierce response left me lightheaded and dizzy. I nipped and sucked at his lips and tongue as he opened to me. We rolled and he rose over me, pushing me back into the blanket. Pressing his body into mine, he wedged his knee between my thighs, pushing them apart. A hand tangled in my hair, pulling my head back and breaking our kiss. Feathering kisses and nips down my jaw and neck, he groaned when my shirt got in his way. With a growl, he fisted his hands in the thin fabric and ripped it apart. The sound of the fabric tearing sent a thrill shivering down my spine and a flood of wet heat to my groin.

"Oh!" I gasped with a laugh, arching my body towards him. Logan grinned wickedly before leaning in to nibble at my shoulder. A low moan escaped when his hand closed over my breast. Chuckling as I arched into his caress again, he pinched the nipple at the same time as he nipped my collarbone. Breath hitching again, I squirmed under him, trying to loosen his shirt so my hands could delve beneath it. The fabric disappeared and I dragged my fingers over his bare skin. He groaned deep in his chest.

Trailing, lower, he licked the valley between my breasts and planted a love bite on the soft upper curve of one. By the time his mouth engulfed the aching tip with its heat, I was shivering with anticipation. A cry of pleasure and my hands buried themselves in his thick black hair.

Licking and nipping at the peak, he sucked it into his mouth, pulling at it, like a babe. His hands pushed under my torso, lifting me. Suckling it until it was swollen and red, he switched to the other, drawing a moan from me. One hand drifted down my hip, hooking under my knee and pulling it up around his waist. The slide of denim on my inner thigh transformed to bare skin and he ground his now naked erection against my panty clad pussy. Breath hitching, I hooked my leg over his hips and pushed back against him.

"Fuck yeah," he hissed, raising up to kiss me again. Sliding his body along mine, he wound my nerves tighter and tighter.

"Logan," I whispered, breathing his name. Undulating under him, I sought more contact, more pleasure. He kissed me again, dipping his tongue in my mouth before thrusting his hips hard against my groin in a promise of things to come. I gasped as he slid down my body once more, pausing briefly to tease each nipple with his mouth. His tongue dipped into my belly button, making me laugh. Grabbing the edge of my panties in his teeth, he growled playfully against my mound and I lurched at the vibration through my skin. Then he moved lower.

"Oh! Shit!" I cried, shuddering when his teeth grazed over my still covered clit. Chuckling darkly, he slipped his tongue under the elastic and delved between the folds of sensitive skin.

"F-fuck!" I cursed breathily, grabbing handfuls of his hair to hold him close, grinding my pussy into his face. My panties disappeared, willed away either by myself or him, I didn't care so long as it left him unrestricted access to me.

He murmured appreciatively as the fabric vanished and lapped hungrily at my clit. Every so often, he dipped down and thrust his tongue into my slit, stroking inside. Then he'd drag the entire length along my clit in a long, hot, upward slide.

I shivered, bowing my body with his movements. Suddenly he growled, biting the inside of my thigh. I yelped in surprise. It wasn't a hard bite, but the sharp nip of his teeth shot through me like lightning. His thick finger slipped into my pussy and he stroked against the inner wall, curling it up to hit that secret place inside. A keening sound escaped me at the jolt

of sensation. I cried out loud when he thrust a second finger into me, then a third.

"Oh fuck! Oh fuck!" I wailed as he wound me tighter and tighter. He sucked hard on my clit and I shattered, calling his name as I fell to pieces. I whimpered a protest when he pulled away from me. Growling, he nipped the other thigh. I jumped with a squeak and then he was covering me with his big body again. His mouth was everywhere, kissing, nipping, licking, sucking. Gripping, pinching, petting, stroking, his hands touched every part of me. He kissed me again and I tasted myself on his tongue as it swept into my mouth.

Hooking a leg over his hip, I attempted to pull him closer. I slipped a hand between us and wrapped my fingers around his length. He broke the kiss with a snarl and thrust into my hand, precum slicking my palm.

"Fuck me, Logan. Oh God, fuck me," I pleaded, pulling at his hips. Instead, he held himself rigid as he thrust through my fingers again. Looking up at him, his eyes flashed a broken green and he looked almost feral. His teeth were bared and clenched as he moved over me. The only sounds he made were growls and groans and snarls that resonated from his chest.

Abruptly he pulled away from me and I cried out at the loss of his heat from my skin. Growling again, he flipped me onto my stomach and yanked me to my knees. Before I could get my hands under me or catch my breath, he rammed into my pussy.

"Fuck!" I sobbed. "Yes! Oh, yes!" Fucking me hard, his hips slapped into my ass over and over. One hand held a bruising grip on my hip, the other reached down to tangle in my hair. Seizing a fistful of the ebony tresses in his hand, he held me down, face in the blanket and ass in the air, driving his cock deep in my body. Each impact of his body on mine was punctuated by a snarl that steadily rose in volume. Anyone other than Logan and the sound might have scared me, but with him it just felt right and I gasped at the thrill it sent through me.

I wailed in ecstasy as he thrust faster and faster. He faltered, losing his rhythm in favor of force. Stiffening with a roar, he seized against me, shooting his seed deep inside. Suddenly, he yanked me up against his chest

and sank his teeth into my shoulder. His free hand found my clit and strummed over it, pinching tightly. I came with a scream, bucking on his cock.

Chapter 42

Beasty

I woke with a shout, body jerking as I ejaculated against the figure in my arms. Michelle trembled in the throes of her own climax. Panting hard into her hair, I struggled to catch my breath. I couldn't remember my dream, but I could imagine what it was about considering the amount of arousal scenting the air, the cum sticking to her back and my belly, and the fact that I still had a hand down her panties, her orgasm slicking my palm.

Shamelessly taking advantage of her mostly unconscious state, I rolled her clit between my fingers. She gasped quietly, sleepily shuddering and arching against my hand. Her hips shoved backwards, stroking down my semi hard erection. Growling softly, I nipped the back of her shoulder. That was a mistake. The sharp pleasure pain of my teeth on her skin snapped her fully awake and she went stiff in my arms as her senses tried to process everything all at once. With an outraged shriek, she bolted away from me, ripping free of my embrace.

"OH. MY. GOD!" She exclaimed, glaring down at me. "What the hell are you doing!?"

"The same as you," I smirked. "I woke to both your climax and my own. Perhaps we shared the sweetest of dreams?" I leered, licking her arousal from my fingers. "I knew you would taste delicious."

"I think I'd remember your ugly ass face in my dreams," she snapped, scowling. "Ugh! And my shirt? I can't believe you did that! Again! That's disgusting! FYI, it's not sexy when a human guy does it either," she shuddered expressively. Holding her wet shirt away from her skin, she stalked off to the bathroom. "And keep your damn hands off me!" Slamming the door behind her, I grinned as she uttered loud complaints to herself before the shower came on and drowned her out.

I felt good. Better than I had in a long time. A good night's sleep can do miracles for a body, but this was different. This was more. Lazily, I licked the remainder of her essence from my hand. Little Bird had a sweet

musky flavor, a little salty, she was just as mouthwatering as I'd imagined. I was tempted to pull her from the water and taste her on my tongue, but the urge was mostly playful and fleeting, not the overwhelming desire to dominate and take, unlike, the previous days I'd spent with the enticing female. Perhaps my monster was sated for now?

Using the sullied blanket to wipe myself clean, I lay back in the bedding wishing I could remember anything from my wet dream. It must have been incredible, for me to have spilled myself on her body like that. Unfortunately, none of it came to mind. No regrets though, she had felt amazing under my hands as she climaxed, gushing between my fingers. Had I brought her to satisfaction or was it simply a product of her own dream? Had her arousal set off my own?

The shower shut off and I listened to the quiet rustling of my little bird as she dried off. I could hear the chattering of her teeth and nearly laughed aloud as she cursed the nonfunctional water heater. My eyes drifted shut as I indolently waited for her to emerge. Finally, the door opened and I heard a sigh of frustration.

"Don't you have somewhere to be? You know like gathering dinner or something?" She grumbled testily.

"I am exactly where I want to be," I announced loftily, not opening my eyes.

"Yeah well, I want to you to get up. I need to wash that blanket. There is no way in hell I'm sleeping on a bed covered in…you," Michelle complained, hesitantly poking me with her foot.

Swiftly, I grabbed her ankle and pulled. She fell with a squeal and landed heavily on my torso. Rolling, I pinned her beneath me. Little Bird's body went tense and her expression angry, but she didn't fight me.

"Get off me," she growled stiffly.

"Mmm, I love that sound from you and you feel so good. I like it right here," I replied, snuggling into her. She was soft and warm and still smelled so delicious. A slight purring sound rattled in my chest, both unfamiliar and welcoming to my senses. Huffing, she gradually relaxed and lay limp in my arms.

“Come on Beasty. I don’t want to be here all day. It’s already after noon. I want to get that blanket washed before I can’t see what I’m doing,” she whined after a while, hands pushing lightly at me. I chuckled in her ear.

“Very well my lovely. Gather your things, I’ll walk you to the creek. It will be easier to wash the blanket there,” I answered agreeably.

“Really? You’re letting me go outside?” She asked in surprise.

“You will not leave my sight,” I warned, wagging a finger at her as I sat back. She was still pinned between my knees, looking up at me.

“Yeah, don’t worry about that! After what has happened all the other times, I’m sticking close to you,” she stated firmly, crossing her heart in promise. I huffed, amused, and stood.

Offering my hand, she surprised me by accepting it and allowing me to help her up. Gathering up the sticky blanket for her, I waited while she checked the others. Once she’d determined that only the one was soiled, we headed down the stairs where she ducked into the storeroom and grabbed another bottle of soap.

It was late afternoon and the air was comfortable enough, but with sunset approaching, the temperature would drop fairly quickly. That meant that even though the blanket was thin with age, it would still take hours for it to dry properly. It would very likely be mid-day or later tomorrow before it was fully dry, if the weather held. At least the sky was clear of any storm indicators.

At the creek, Michelle stepped into the clear water, carefully trying not to disturb the sediment on the bottom. My female submerged the dirty blanket and squirted soap on it. Gathering handfuls of wet material, she scrubbed them together. Lather spread section by section until the entire blanket was sudsy. Enlisting my help, we gave it a thorough rinse, then wrung it out as much as possible, wetting my bandages in the process. Voluntarily carrying the water-heavy bedding back to the cabin, I found myself amazed at how much lighter in color it was, but then, I couldn’t remember ever having washed any of my bedding.

“We must wash all of the bedding,” I announced decisively as we walked. The girl gave a short bark of laughter and spared me a side eyed glance before replying.

“Yeah, sure. One at a time though ok? Otherwise we won’t have anything to sleep on and it gets kinda chilly at night,” she answered rationally.

“You can sleep on me,” I offered, wagging my ears at her. “I am soft and fluffy like a puppy. I will keep you warm.”

“Only if I get to neuter you first,” Little Bird replied dryly. I winced dramatically and stepped away from her. Her laughter was real and rich, rolling through the trees and warming my spirit.

“Fine. One at a time,” I grumbled agreeably, hiding my grin. She chuckled at my tone and patted my arm absently.

Today, this moment, I felt so different from my usual self. How could one fragile little female cause so much upheaval in such a short time? This little dancer came into my life and turned everything I knew completely upside down.

I could still feel the talons and fangs and sharp edges growling and clawing at the corners of my mind, just waiting for something to set me off. Waiting for its chance to strike out in anger or slake its greedy lustful desires. Yes, it was still there, but the monster was quiet, watchful and muted…for now.

Little Bird’s trash pile from her cleaning frenzy still sat in the yard. I dug the broken chairs out of it and we spread the blanket over them. It was already getting cooler, but tomorrow should be warm enough.

Chapter 43

Michelle

He was so different and not just from this morning. The difference was at times both a welcome change and downright unnerving. Today, he acted more like the guy next door than the imprisoning beast I'd spent the last two weeks with. Had it really been two weeks already? It felt like forever and yet no time at all.

After we draped the blanket out to dry, I helped gather kindling for a fire and watched while he got it started. One of the dogs trotted up with a rabbit. Beasty skinned and cleaned it, setting it aside on a spit until the fire was ready. A stiff breeze ruffle my clothes and I shivered. Winter in Idaho was hard enough in the city, in my cozy, well-heated apartment. How bad would it be out here in the mountains?

I hugged my knees as I thought about the months to come. Using the woodstove was out of the question. I'd checked it the day I cleaned the downstairs rooms the first time. The chimney was blocked in places, collapsed in others. The stove itself had a hole in the bottom and a huge rat's nest inside. Most of the windows were broken. Half the doors didn't close properly, including the main door in and out of the cabin. There was maybe a month's worth of MREs, two if I stretched it, and no medicine to speak of. The more I thought about it, the more depressed and worried I got.

"What's wrong?" Beasty asked, noticing the turn in my mood.

"You can't keep me here Beasty. I won't make it through the winter. I need to go home," I answered without looking up. He sighed and didn't reply right away. Instead, he stood and walked around behind me. Dropping onto his heels, he wrapped his arms around me and pulled me into the curve of his body. His knees framed either side of me and I felt engulfed in his embrace. I let him hold me. I needed the comfort, even if it came from the hairy twisted being that kept me as a pet. We sat like that for a time, silently watching the fire burn down to coals. Finally, he heaved a great sigh and spoke.

“I know…” he stated quietly, hesitating.

“But?” I prompted.

“But I can’t let you go. I just can’t. Don’t ask me to,” his arms tightened around me and he buried his muzzle in my hair again, breathing shakily.

“Don’t expect me to stop,” I warned stiffly. “I don’t want to die out here.” Pushing at his arms, I made it clear I wanted up. He held on, just a little longer, then reluctantly let me go. Angrily, I stalked into the house and up the stairs to my room. Frustrated, I threw myself down on the bedding and cried. I didn’t want to cry, crying solved nothing, but once the tears started, I couldn’t stop them.

Beasty came in with food while I wept, but I ignored him and he left without bothering me. Crying out all my stress and fear and frustrations was freeing. I felt somewhat better as I finally calmed. Washing my face in the bathroom, I really looked at myself for the first time in several days. I had new bruises over the old, some from my fall, some from the lynx’s attack. My complexion was pale and my nose red from crying. Swelling around my eyes made me look puffy but I’d definitely lost weight. My mom would be thrilled, she was always after me to lose the last of my “baby fat” as she called it. Sighing, I picked at the food, quickly pushing it aside as I lacked any kind of an appetite.

Watching the sunset from the balcony, I continued to ponder just how long I might last once winter arrived. It was a bleak and morbid turn of thought that left me angry and depressed once more, but I knew without a doubt, I wouldn’t get out of the valley alive unless Beasty helped me escape. I’d been attacked too many times now. Irritably, I turned in early and lay sleeplessly staring at the ceiling as the room faded into darkness.

Just as I was finally dozing off, a large body slipped into the bed behind me and gathered me close, snuggling against me and murmuring contentedly.

“I can’t let you go, I just can’t,” he whispered. “Not yet…”

Wakey, wakey, Tiny Dancer,” Logan crooned in my ear. I rolled to look over my shoulder at him. He cuddled against my back, arms around

my waist to hold me tight. Smiling brightly, he placed a quick kiss on my lips.

"What shall we do today, my sweet?" He asked when he drew back again.

"Mmm, I can think of a few things I'd like," I purred, pressing my ass into his groin. He groaned and grabbed my hip to still my movements.

"Yes, but if we do that first, we won't have time to explore and I've brought us somewhere really neat that I remembered. I wanted to show it to you before you woke up," he chuckled. "I promise you'll like it."

"Oh, all right," I grumbled. Getting up, I stumbled off the bed and nearly fell when the room morphed abruptly. I was now standing in a verdant green jungle. The low shushing of ocean waves in the distance teased at my hearing on one side, and the light rumble of people and machinery came from the other.

"Where are we?" I asked as Logan rested his hands on my shoulders and placed a quick kiss on the top of my head. Looking up and over my shoulder at him, I wondered at the melancholy look in his eyes.

"Welcome to Tenerife, the largest of the Canary Islands," he stated, smiling sadly.

"Are you okay?" I turned to hug his torso.

"I don't know," he admitted. "There's something about this place, something really important."

"Hmm, well, let's go have a look-see then," I suggested, waving in the direction of the people sounds.

"Yeah, sure," he agreed, distractedly. We headed out and in a very short time, the jungle opened up in front of us. A terraced, Aztecan-style pyramid structure towered over a clearing cluttered with tents and equipment. Portable stadium lights sat around the edges, ready to light up as night fell. People bustled in and out of the pyramid itself, all headed to one tent or another.

"Unreal," I breathed, awestruck. "How did an Aztec pyramid get here? I thought they were only in South America." Logan laughed.

“It’s not Aztecan,” he explained. “This was built by the Guanches culture. The Guanches are believed to be of African and Berber descent. This is the Temple of Achaman, the Father God. According to legends, Achaman battled the evil Guayota and defeated him, saving the world from darkness and locking Guayota in the underworld. There’s other pyramids here on Tenerife, but this one is newly discovered.”

“Really? That is so awesome.” Logan smiled and opened his mouth to say something else, but was interrupted.

“Dr. Michaels!” A voice called. We looked up to see a young woman waving from the edge of camp. “Dr. Michaels, we found something!”

“I think she’s talking to you,” I commented wryly.

“I think you might be right,” he grinned. Hurrying over to the excited girl, we followed her through the camp. Catching up to her, he touched her arm, stopping her. “What’s going on?” He asked. She turned to face us and I was struck with a strong sense of déjà vu as I met her gaze. There was something so familiar about her eyes, I just couldn’t put my finger on it.

“We got it open!” She gushed excitedly.

“Got what open?” He pushed gently.

“The vault of course! Dr. Michaels you’re always so silly,” the girl chided teasingly. Logan’s breath hitched. The young woman watched him expectantly.

“The Vault of Teide?” He questioned, his voice barely audible as a faraway look crossed his face.

“Of course,” she chirped, spinning around and resuming her jog through the tents. Logan darted after her, dragging me along.

“I remember this!” He stated as we hurried. “I remember working here! This was my first dig after I finished my graduate studies and internships!”

At the far side of the encampment, people talked excitedly about the newly opened vault. The girl joined a group of four men, waving her hands for their attention. They looked up and smiled at our approach. Again, I

was struck with the strangest sense of déjà vu, I felt as if I knew them myself somehow.

Two of the men were slightly older than Logan; the others looked younger. Of the older men, one was a wiry fellow with grumpy brown eyes and huge heavy glasses. His scruffy brown hair stuck up all over his head as if he was constantly running his hands through it. The other was a stout man with friendly blue eyes and grey streaks in his limp blonde locks.

The younger men were both athletic and fit. One, a tall, muscular black man with the darkest complexion I'd ever seen, smiled down at me. His hazel eyes were mischievous, laughing orbs and he had the whitest teeth imaginable. They glowed in stark contrast against his ebony skin. The man at his side was a slender, ginger haired boy with a swimmer's body and freckles on every inch of his pale, sun pinkened skin. His eyes were dark green, shyly peering at me as he waved a small hello.

The girl cuddled into the ginger boy's side with a grin. Now that she was standing still and looking directly at me, I could see she was even more petite than I was. Her shiny blonde hair fell in a straight wave down her back and sad, patient blue eyes watched us, waiting for something. The sudden silence and watchful gazes of the group was a bit unsettling.

"Aren't you going to introduce us to your friend, boss?" The friendly black man prompted, breaking the silence. Logan shook himself.

"Uh yeah, Michelle, this is my team," he started hesitantly. "This is Dante," he said pointing to the man who'd spoken. Dante grinned that blinding white smile once more and stuck out his hand.

"Call me Danny, baby girl," he offered, eyes crinkling merrily as I shook his hand.

"That's Eric and Robert, or Bob as he prefers," Logan continued, pointing out the redhead and the older guy, both of whom gave a short nod, but said nothing. "And that's Big Mike." The portly man waved, patting his belly with a grin. Then the girl stepped forward and looked up at me with those impossibly sad eyes.

"This is my personal assistant, Carol," Logan finished the introductions on a quiet, slightly confused note. I started at the sound of

her name, staring at her suspiciously but not knowing why I felt that way. Carol gave a little smile and grabbed my hand.

"You should see what we found," she said in a serious tone.

Pulling me by the hand, she led me over to a table at the back of the pavilion. There, nestled in a box of packing straw, was a small, black, clay statuette. The little relic was no more than six inches tall and was cut in the blocky shape of a person, but with the head of an animal. It was dark and sinister looking. A shiver of trepidation capered down my spine just from seeing it.

"What is it?" I asked nervously.

"It's a tibicena. The demon dog offspring of Guayota, the God of Chaos," Logan answered mechanically, coming up to stand beside me. He seemed mesmerized by the figurine and I watched in horror as he reached for the evil looking thing. I lurched forward to stop him, but hands stopped me. Carol and the others held me back, pulling me away from Logan as he wrapped his fingers around the terrible artifact.

"You can't stop this. You can only watch," Carol intoned gravely. "You must see and understand."

An oily black cloud erupted, engulfing Logan and spreading to cover everything. The campsite disappeared in the dark, roiling smoke. Sounds cut off abruptly and color vanished until I stood alone in a tiny patch of light.

"Find him," voices rang from the darkness. The whispers hissed and echoed around me, then suddenly cut off by a terrifying growl. Huge, slitted, red eyes opened above me and glared down with a hate-filled, malicious gleam. The growl grew louder, reaching a crescendo of sound that crashed over me, making me clap my hands over my ears and cry out. The voices screamed with me, fearful and hurting. The shadow rolled like a wave, rising high overhead then curling down to crash over me.

"Save him!"

I screamed just before the darkness consumed me.

Chapter 44

Beasty

I woke, unsettled and shaking, only moments before Michelle screamed in her sleep. The sound was raw and filled with terror. She bolted off the bedding, lunging away from me and stumbling when the sheets tangled around her legs. Crashing to the floor, she hugged herself tightly, eyes darting wildly about the room. My little bird flinched visibly when her eyes fell on me, then looked away, shrinking in on herself.

Unwilling to admit how much that bothered me, I rolled to my feet and stalked out, slamming the door. Quiet sobs escaped the room behind me and I paused, wondering if I should go back and try to comfort her. Shaking myself, I shrugged off my discomfort and went down the stairs.

I spied the mess before I even got outside. Visible from inside, the ground in front of the door was littered with bits of fabric. The blanket we'd washed had been pulled down and ripped to shreds. Each bit was filthy and unusable. Not a single fragment was bigger than Michelle's little palms. The mess was strewn across the clearing from one end of the yard to the other. A pile of scraps had been dumped in the firepit and the whole thing stank of shit and piss.

"What the hell happened?" Michelle's ragged voice asked incredulously. Turning, I found her in the doorway, eyes puffy from crying. One hand clutched loosely at her shirt front as she stared at the mess.

"Something tore the blanket up," I answered simply.

"Tore it up? You mean the obliterated it," she replied heatedly. "This is insane. Was it one of the dogs? All of them?"

"I don't believe so," I said with a shrug. She stared disbelievingly at me.

"I can't! I can't deal with this, with…with you! With any of this right now. I just can't," she declared, throwing her hands up and stomping back up the stairs. A door slammed moments later and I heard an irate exclamation of sound from the open balcony doors.

Calmly, I shoveled the stinking mess from the pit and tossed it into the underbrush. My pack trotted around, gathering the other bits and pieces from everywhere and dumping them with the rest of the trash. All of them that is except Carol, who I assumed was with Little Bird, and Shayla, who I hadn't seen since my seizure.

Once the firepit was cleaned and useable again, I laid some kindling in it and got it ready for use later. Then I gathered a bowl of the swiftly dwindling wild currants and black berries. That source of food wouldn't last much longer, I needed to look further afield soon. Taking the fruit upstairs to my female, I was surprised to see her already holding a bowl in her lap. A vague feeling of horror swept through me as she raised a harmless looking mushroom to her lips.

"No!" I bellowed, slapping the fungus out of her hand. She squawked in terror and dove away from me, dropping the bowl which spilled more of the offending mushrooms on the floor. Snatching up the bowl and the fallen toadstools, I threw them off the balcony.

"What the hell was that!?" My female shrieked hysterically as I turned to her.

"Did you eat any!?" I demanded, grabbing her upper arms.

"Ow! Let go of me you asshole!" She replied without answering.

"Answer me! Did you eat any of them!?" I roared, shaking her in my panic.

"No damnit! I didn't eat any yet! Now let go, you're hurting me!" She cried. I released her arms only to yank her against my chest in a relieved crush. She kicked my shins and pushed at me, trying to escape me, but her efforts were futile.

"The fuck is wrong with you now?" Her irritated voice was muffled in my fur.

"Those mushrooms are poisonous, toxic, too many can be lethal, where did you get them?" I answered, finally letting her step back.

"The bowl was sitting there when I came out of the bathroom. I figured you left it like always," Michelle's eyes widened worriedly as she

realized the implications. I pulled her into my arms again. She came willingly this time, letting me hold her. “Great, another attempt to kill me…I hate this place,” she sniffled into my chest.

Me too, I thought unhappily. How much longer did I have with my little bird before she was badly injured? Or would she become seriously ill first? How long until I risked her death for my selfishness? This couldn’t keep happening. Even as I thought that though, something growled possessively in my head and my arms tightened around her. She squeaked and pushed away from me. Reluctantly releasing her, I watched quietly as she rubbed her hands over her arms.

Chapter 45

Michelle

Beasty stood watching me, staring wordlessly as I tried to rub the chill of fear away. He even looked a little worried too, but that jealous, controlling glint in his eye told me nothing had changed. He still couldn't let me go. Huffing under his breath, he turned to the door.

"Come female," he ordered, waving me to follow. "Come outside with me. You can eat one of your package meals out in the sun where it is warmer."

"Are you seriously going to ignore what just happened?" I challenged disbelievingly.

"You are unharmed, that is what matters," he responded flatly.

"What…the FUCK…is wrong with you!? Someone just left toxic shrooms for me to eat, in an obvious attempt to make me sick, or kill me! Again! And you say its fine as long as they failed? What about next time? Huh? What happens when the next animal to come after me is a bear? Or a cougar? What if there's more than one? Can you fight off two bears before a third one kills me!? What happens if the next venomous snake crawls into bed with me while I'm sleeping? What are you going to do when the poisonous food gets mixed into the real food and you miss it!? Can you set the broken bones if I get pushed out a window!? Stitch me up when I get cut on the glass!? Tell me Beasty! Tell me what you can do except WATCH ME DIE!!" I didn't care that I was screaming at him now, I was frightened and angry.

"ENOUGH!!" He roared in reply, swinging around on me. It wasn't until his claws closed on my shoulders that I realized how close I'd gotten to him in my tirade. They held me tight, but didn't break my skin, even as unhinged as he suddenly sounded. "I can't let you go!" He yelled, shaking me again. Then he surprised the shit out of me by dropping to his knees in front of me. Huge hairy arms wrapped around me once more and he buried his face in the curve of my belly. Shudders wracked his frame as he sucked

in rough gasping breaths. “I can’t let you go,” he whispered harshly. “I can’t. I’m so lost. I can’t lose you, I can’t, I just can’t,” he repeated over and over, arms locked rigidly around me.

It was unnerving. Poor Beasty was just so damaged. He was different, but I wasn’t sure if this was better or worse than the angry animal that pinned me down and humped himself to orgasm on my shirt just a week ago. Time passed so strangely in this valley. I couldn’t be sure how long I’d been here. Only two weeks, or was it longer? Mom and my friends had to be looking for me by now.

Would they find the road I’d taken? Or my car at the bottom of the cliff or drop-off or whatever I’d gone over? Beasty let out a harsh, almost sob sound that drew my attention back to the present and the monster that clung to me so desperately. I sighed softly.

Ever so gently, I put a hand on his head. Not knowing how he’d react, I didn’t want to provoke him while his emotions ran so high. He tensed, arms tightening fractionally, but fell silent, almost holding his breath. Tenderly, I stroked his fur, scratching lightly around his ears. He shivered and I made quiet shushing sounds.

“Easy, easy now Beasty,” I crooned soothingly. “Hush now. It’s gonna be okay.” Beasty sniffed, arms relaxing minutely. His head tilted, exposing one sad, nearly green eye that peered up at me. The weird red lines were still there, but only in tiny streaks and cracks showing through the vivid emerald color. There was such a lost expression in that eye. “It’s okay. We’ll figure it out another day, okay?” He gave a tiny nod without letting go. “Get up Beasty. I’m getting hungry. Let’s go eat,” I pulled carefully at his arms, encouraging him to stand.

Hesitantly, he clambered to his feet and stood watching me anxiously. I pushed him towards the door. He finally took a few steps, but stopped short, turning and grabbing my hand as if afraid I wouldn’t follow.

“Take it easy buddy. I’m not going anywhere,” I patted the back of his hand, letting him pull me along. “I can’t leave without your help anyways. I don’t know the way out,” I shrugged, half teasingly. A guilty grimace flitted across his face before he turned and led me down the stairs.

A brief stop in the storeroom to grab an MRE and I let him lead me outside.

Beasty was unnaturally quiet as he picked a sunny spot near the cold firepit and arranged me to sit between his knees. At his insistence, I found myself leaning back against his chest while he nuzzled my hair. If it kept him calm, I'd put up with it for a little while. Most of the dogs wandered into the clearing and calmly settled around us. Carol was the only one that actually lay close to us though. As I sat in front of Beasty and silently ate my ham and potato mush, I realized I didn't know any of their names except for Carol and Shayla.

"Hey Beasty," I said softly.

"Hmm?"

"What are all their names? I only know Carol and Shayla," I asked.

"Oh, well that one there is Danny, that's Eric, he's Robert, and that one's-" he started, pointing to each in turn.

"Big Mike," I interrupted, shock taking hold. Beasty stilled, but I barely noticed. The one he named Danny had the darkest fur, whitest teeth, and hazel eyes. Eric was the skinny younger canine with dark green eyes. Robert was a grumpy older animal. And Big Mike was the heaviest.

"How did you know that?" Beasty asked warily, his voice penetrating my stunned mind. I turned, raising up on my knees to look him in the eye. Those bright green eyes were suddenly, achingly familiar, even with the red crackles around the edges. His head tilted curiously, pressing into the hand I hadn't realized I'd placed on the side of his muzzle.

"Logan? Is that really you?" I whispered disbelievingly. His head snapped back like I'd slapped him and he froze, his entire body clenching from head to toe. "Logan!?" I cried loudly, reaching for him again. My fingers just barely brushed his whiskers when he gave a violent heave and I was thrown away from his seizing body. I tumbled into the grass and rolled to my knees just as the first shrieks tore from his throat.

"Logan!!" I screamed, terrified by the sight of his writhing form.

Chapter 46

Logan

The name struck me like a bullet. It stuck in my head, rattling around, hurtling into things, and shredding barriers I hadn't known I'd had. The walls in my mind shattered and came crashing down. Memories poured out of the cracks and crevices, flooding me with a barrage of sounds and scents and sensations. One became two, then turned into twenty and forty and hundreds. Each one bombarding me with a knowledge of self, of family and home. I was Logan Michaels. I was that man. With that knowledge, I remembered the dreams I'd shared with Michelle.

Pain split my skull in a snarling frenzy only I could hear. Michelle, beautiful sweet Michelle. My tiny dancer, my little bird. Her frightened voice called my name hesitantly, fingers brushing my face, hands patting my arms, my chest.

I seized again, more viciously than before. I thrashed so hard, she fell away from me. I couldn't reach out to help her up. Agony ripped through me, tearing the cries from my lips. She screamed my name.

The seizure ended as abruptly as it started. Collapsing in a boneless heap, I struggled to breath. Shudders wracked my body again and again. Darkness clouded my vision, threatening to steal my consciousness. I blinked, trying to clear the shadows away.

"Logan?" Michelle whispered apprehensively. Her hands reached for me tentatively. They feathered over my face and chest, then she was lifting my torso, pulling my big twisted body into her arms as best she could. It was a struggle though, I was almost too heavy, but she somehow got her legs wedged under my shoulders and had her arms supporting my head in her lap.

Soft, soothing nonsense noises escaped her as she rocked with me. Her tiny hands rubbed circles into my fur as I gasped for air. The pack watched noiselessly, waiting with expectant expressions. Slowly, the pain

faded and the shaking subsided. When I could move on my own again, I turned to look at her face.

Those beautiful, worried, blue eyes went wide with shock and I knew she truly saw me. Her hands flew to her mouth in shock, tears gleaming at the edges of her eyes. Gently I cupped her cheek, astounded at the sight of my dark, disfigured hand on her pale skin.

“Hello Tiny Dancer,” I whispered hoarsely. With a sob, she threw her arms around my neck. “I’m sorry,” I murmured, burying my face in her hair. Tears streamed down my muzzle as I recalled every terrible thing I had said and done to my little dancer. “I’m sorry,” I repeated, clutching her close. “I’m sorry. I’m so very sorry my love. I’m so sorry.”

“Shh, no, no its okay. It’s okay. You’re here. It’s really you. You’re here. How? How did this happen? How did you become this?”

“I…I’m not sure. I can feel the other me, the monster, he’s still in my head, but I’m back in control. I don’t remember everything. There’s more than there was, and I remember me, but I’m still missing something. It’s there, I can feel it, but it’s…fuzzy,” I struggled for the right words.

“What about them? Are they really your team mates from the dig? What happened to them? How did they turn into dogs?” She asked waving at my pack. I looked at them, really looked at them and my heart ached.

“Yes…yes they are. They were my friends,” another memory blossomed. A terrible, pain filled memory that tore at me and I gulped back my grief. Carol gazed at me with sad, knowing eyes. They knew… they knew the truth. I was certain they’d always known.

“What about Shayla? She wasn’t in my dream with the others,” Michelle pushed me to remember more. My head throbbed, but with the pain came a deadly clarity.

“Come,” I said, standing suddenly. I staggered a bit, but shook it off.

“Where are we going?” Michelle questioned as I pulled her to her feet.

“You must leave. Now. I have to get you out of here. It’s not safe for you,” I explained. “I can take you to the far end of the valley. There’s a

service road that leads to a Ranger's station. It's usually unmanned this time of year, but the radio is maintained regularly. You can use it to call for help."

"No, wait. What about you and the others? How do you know all that?" She protested.

"This was my granddad's cabin. I spent every summer here until I was sixteen. He died that year and left it to me, but my family stopped coming out here regularly. I don't even know if my parents remember where it is," I explained, looking up at the crumbling cabin. "It doesn't matter. We have to get you out of here. The pack and I will be fine as long as you're safe." She yanked her hand free and stopped.

"Of course it matters! I can't just leave you here," her dainty little foot stomped decisively, punctuating her last word.

"You cannot stay! And I cannot leave! There is something bad, something terrible in this place and it keeps me here. It follows me. It wants to hurt you; I can feel it. I can't let anything happen to you. Whatever it is almost destroyed me, all on its own. If it takes you it would succeed. I can't let it have you, I can't risk it," my impassioned tirade trailed off into softer, more painful words. "You are the most important part of my life. I can only protect you by sending you away. Losing you to whatever darkness haunts this valley would destroy me." A stiff wind slammed into me and I looked up. The clear sunny sky had transformed into a roiling mass of dark clouds. "It's coming."

"But I just found you!" She cried. I gathered her close, tucking my face into her hair and breathing in her scent one last time. Every ache, every pain I'd ever felt was gone in that moment. Thanks to the small, sweet woman in my arms.

"And I thank you for that," I whispered in her ear. "This place was driving me mad. I was lost and nearly gave into the darkness so many times before you came. You found me, rescued me. I remember myself now and I'll never lose that again. I'll hold you in my heart forever, my love. But you must leave. There is a storm coming, I need to see you safely on the road before it hits."

Danny and Carol appeared with Michelle's shoes and coat that I'd hidden in the upstairs closet. How they got them out I didn't know, but it didn't matter as long as we left as soon as possible. Michelle reluctantly slipped her things on and wiped her face on her sleeve. The wind had turned chilly now, carrying the promise of heavy rain or worse. Thunder rolled ominously overhead.

"We have to go, quickly. Climb on my back!" I ordered dropping to all fours. She eyed me dubiously, then swung her leg over and pulled herself up behind my shoulders. Wrapping her arms around my neck, she held tightly. I shuddered slightly at the feel of her legs around my waist. With a deep focusing inhale, I set out across the valley. The service road was at the far end, only a few miles, but it seemed like an impossible distance all of a sudden.

The storm arrived, pouring down viciously and soaking us both in seconds. Michelle clung to my back like a monkey, shielding her face from the stinging rain. Hail pelted down, driving into us and forcing me under the trees. The forest around us thrashed and creaked in the shrieking wind. Lightning and thunder were a constant barrage of blinding flashes and deafening sound. Just short of two miles from where the road crossed the end of the valley, Michelle tugged on my ear.

"Logan! What's that?" She asked, shouting over the storm, as she pointed through the trees. Slowing to look, I followed her finger with my eyes.

There, at the bottom of a cliff and half buried by debris and overgrown with plants, were the remains of an old jeep. It was dented and filthy and faded to an ugly brown, but I knew that underneath the dirt and age, it used to be an eye-glaringly bright yellow. It had been so long since I'd last seen the wreckage. Something had kept me away from it all this time, kept me from finding it and remembering.

Chapter 47

Michelle

Beasty's, no, Logan's stride faltered and he stopped, staring. Wordlessly, I slid off his back. He straightened, almost unnoticing of me and moved towards the wrecked SUV. Rain poured down on us, unheeded as we took in the destroyed vehicle.

"The Banana Boat," he muttered under his breath, I almost didn't hear him over the storm.

"The what?" I prompted.

"It's my jeep. Carol always called it the Banana Boat because it was the brightest, most obnoxious shade of banana yellow," he gave an involuntary half chuckle at the memory. The sound was strained and choked off at the end.

"What happened? How did it get here?"

"We were headed to the cabin for a break after the Tenerife dig. We'd been out a long time and just wanted to enjoy some downtime," he answered mechanically. "There was a bad storm, much like this one. We got caught in a landslide. It knocked us off the cliff road, up there," he pointed up the rock wall to the edge, some thirty-forty feet up. A chunk of rock was gouged out of the lip, leaving an ugly scar down the cliff face. Thunder crashed, threatening and loud.

"Then what happened?"

"The car wasn't as buried as it is now, just banged up really bad. Carol was trapped in the third row. I think she was hurt, she was screaming. Eric had been thrown when the car rolled. He was knocked unconscious and landed over there. A tree branch punctured the door, here, and went through Dante's leg, pinning him in the middle seat," Logan detailed, his hand touching a jagged hole in the side of the vehicle. He jerked at a nearby crack of lightning. "Robert was next to Danny, he got banged up, but didn't seem to be hurt too bad. He couldn't get out though.

He was on the far side of Danny with a jammed seatbelt. He was trying to help Danny."

"What about the rest of you?"

"I got a knock on the head, but nothing serious, my seatbelt held properly and I stumbled out of the driver's seat easy enough. Big Mike… he wasn't wearing his seatbelt. He got thrown through the windshield. The front half of his body looked like he'd been peeled with a dull knife. He… he was hemorrhaging blood everywhere. I tried to stop the bleeding, but there was so much of it." Logan shuddered, staring at his hands as if he could still see the blood. I shivered as well. Lightning flashed again, striking the road above us.

Logan's gaze drifted back to the wreckage and a queer expression crossed his face. Hesitantly, he reached out and tore the vines away, revealing the broken side windows. His breath hitched as he looked in the back. The sound pulled me unwillingly forward so I could see as well. Scattered inside were bones, human bones. Not a lot, but enough to know that at least one person was dead. Make that two, I thought, spying a second skull in the floorboard.

"I don't understand," I started. "I thought the dogs were your friends. Who do those bones belong to?" Logan didn't answer right away. Instead, he reached into the Jeep and pulled the remains of a filthy, rotting, water-logged messenger bag out from under the driver's seat.

"My pack are my friends, and I don't know how they're still around, but they are dead. They're…all dead," he answered finally. Flipping the bag's flap out of the way, he exposed the zipper. It was rusted shut and useless, but the rotted seams parted easily.

"What do you mean they're all dead? I've touched them. They're solid, warm, breathing creatures. I've seen them eat and drink and even piss," I protested. "How is that possible? How can they be dead? And what about Shayla? Who was she? What happened to her?"

"It's still in here," Logan commented distractedly, peering into the bag. A wave of thunder roared overhead, shaking the ground threateningly.

“What…what is it? What’s in the bag Logan?” Lightning flared once more. Logan tilted the bag so I could look inside. The idol from my dream glared angrily at me from the bottom of the bag where it lay amongst the random junk items that had survived the years of exposure. I shivered at the sight of it, a chill of fear rattling through me as I remembered my dream.

“What happened to your friends Logan?” I asked again, feeling queasy.

“I killed them…”

“No. No, Logan. That’s not true. There’s no way that’s true,” I denied, shaking my head. In spite of the last couple weeks, I couldn’t imagine Logan hurting his friends. To be honest, I couldn’t see Beasty doing it either, even when he’d been at his worst. Not really. The thunder rolled yet again.

Chapter 48

Logan

Michelle's faith in me was gratifying to hear, but my memories told me something else. Incomplete glimpses of twisted, clawed hands ripping into my friends, the sound of bestial snarls, cries of pain and fear.

"No Logan. I don't believe it! You were trying to help, trying to stop Mike's bleeding. Remember? You were trying to save him! Think back, really think. You have to remember everything," she protested, grabbing my arm and clutching the fur. A flash of memory hit me. Mike's blood on my hands, his body shaking from shock, hands grasping weakly at my sleeve, too far gone to cry out, my own fingers clutching at a hairy, twisted hand that held me by the neck.

Like so many times in the past years, a snarling growl filled my head, but this time it wasn't really in my head, it was something I remembered. The sound wasn't coming from me, it came from a dark figure in my memory. I started talking aloud.

"I…I didn't…kill them. I was distracted by Mike's injuries. I was trying so hard to save him even though I knew it was too late. There was a monster. I didn't see it until it was already on me. The thing looked like me, but scarier, more repulsive, more monstrous even. I was desperately trying to stem the flow of blood from Mike's worst injury when this huge clawed hand wrapped around my neck and yanked me off the ground. I couldn't breathe. I kicked at it, fighting for air…I remember digging at its fingers as I tried to loosen its grip. It just laughed this horrible, evil, grating laugh. Then it turned it's gaze on the dying man at its feet.

"I could only watch in horror as it raised one grotesquely taloned foot and raked it across Mike's throat, ripping him open. Mike drowned in his own blood; his whimpers turned to gurgles as he bled out. He went quiet and limp so quickly. That thing dragged me over to where Eric lay. He was finally starting to come to, but I couldn't warn him, I couldn't… couldn't get a sound out to warn him. The monster reached down and picked him up by his head. I was so close to blacking out from lack of air,

but I watched helplessly as that beast crushed Eric's skull in its hand." I could hear Eric's screams even now; shivers wracked my body.

"Then its attention turned towards the Jeep. I kicked, somehow summoning the strength to fight. I managed to kick it in the knee. That hurt it enough to drop me, but I didn't even have my feet under me before it backhanded me. I was flung into the side of the Jeep. I think I heard my skull break. My eyes wouldn't open at first and my limbs weren't working right. I couldn't seem to move properly.

"Dazed, I could hear Carol crying for help. She was so scared. I tried to get up but that demon kicked me again. Danny and Rob were cursing. I only vaguely remember the sounds they made as it ripped them out of the car. Their blood sprayed across my face as it flung the pieces at me.

"And Carol, oh God Carol...what that thing did to Carol…I can still hear her screams as it ravaged her. Thank God she died quickly. And it laughed. It laughed the whole time. Then it piled pieces of my friends in my lap and told me their deaths were my fault, that I was the reason they were dead. I killed them," I blinked, only now realizing I was crying. The rain had stopped as suddenly as it started and an eerie silence surrounded us. Michelle stood with her arms around me, though I didn't know when she'd done that. Tears streamed down her face as well.

"I passed out from grief and pain. When I woke up, I was…this," I gestured at my body. "My memories were fucked by then and I didn't know who or what I was. I was covered in blood and body parts. My claws matched the wounds on Carol's body. I…maybe I did kill them," I finished sorrowfully.

"No, Logan! It wasn't you!" Michelle squeezed me tighter. "It was staged to look like you did it, but it wasn't you! It wasn't your doing; it wasn't your fault!"

Oh, but it was his fault! A sinister voice announced. The voice was harsh and terrifying. With a gasp, we both jerked towards the sound. Shayla, looking bigger and scarier than ever, stood atop the Jeep, eyes blazing.

“You…you can talk,” Michelle blurted.

Yes, Shayla hissed. *And so much more.*

“There was no Shayla before I woke up,” I accused. The beast chuffed its amusement.

No, there was no Shayla before you were remade, it replied.

“What do you mean remade? Why do you say all this is his fault?” My brave little dancer demanded.

His fault, all his fault, she cackled. *He stole the tibicena. They opened the Gate. They robbed Teide,* Shayla growled. *But him! He stole from Guayota himself! He stole from the master!*

“The idol,” I breathed as realization clicked.

Yesssss, Shayla hissed again. *Guayota has cursed you. Cursed you to bear the demon dog, to walk in His darkness. All for the theft of His last offspring. The temple saved it, kept it alive. It lived in the Gates of Teide, but you. You stole it, took it from the life spring for nothing more than a bauble to look at. You doomed it to die so far from its father. Guayota saved it though, saved His final child. The blood price was paid, the flesh consumed, the life energy reaped. The tibicena lives!* Shayla’s voice rose in volume, but the pitch deepened and fractured until it sounded like multiple voices speaking at once.

“What if the idol is returned to the temple? I can carry it back to Teide, put it back where it won’t be found again,” Michelle offered, bravely drawing Shayla’s attention.

Useless then and useless now. The vessel is no more. The tibicena walks in his body for eternity. I have but to break what is left of his mind and the human inside dies completely. My child will live unfettered once more, Shayla’s voice changed slightly. Her body pulsed with a barely contained darkness.

“You can’t break him now,” Michelle cried. “He remembers who he is, he remembers everything. He’s stronger now.”

He won’t want to when I’m done. Breaking him now will be easier than before. He cared for his friends, but destroying them in front of him

didn't break him completely. You though, he loves you. If watching me murder and violate his closest friends did that to him, imagine what it will do to him when he watches me do even worse to you. And you won't die as quickly as the other female, I promise that! The beast that was once Shayla launched itself at Michelle and I lunged forward to meet it, shoving my female behind me.

Chapter 49

Michelle

I will break your body first and then your mind! The evil Shayla snarled as it grappled with Logan. The thing that fought him now stood upright, but was not quite as large as Logan. It was however meaner and more feral. Its bestial nature showed in its ferocity and fearless attack. Logan had shoved the satchel into my hands when he pushed me behind him. Now, I found I couldn't put it down, despite its hateful contents. Thunder rolled, heavy and ominous, threatening a return of the storm.

I dodged Logan and the monster as they crashed to the ground; mud, leaves, and other debris flying. Fighting like animals, they snarled and snapped, slashing at each other with razor sharp claws. Blood splattered across the clearing as they gored each other.

Suddenly throwing Logan, she advanced on me. He rolled to his feet, leaping onto her back and sinking his teeth into her flesh, His claws ripped at her face. Shrieking in rage, she fell backwards, driving him into the ground. Twisting and bucking, she tried to wrestle free but he hung on doggedly. All I could do was watch. Lightning flashed again and a deluge of blinding rain slammed down on us.

Sheltered behind the wreckage of the Jeep, I fearfully clutched the satchel to my chest, wishing I could help, knowing I'd just get in the way. Rain slick and muddy now, Shayla wrenched free, ripping her own flesh open on Logan's claws. Rolling to her feet, her head whipped around, eyes locking on me.

Leaping over the vehicle, she snatched at me. I dove out of reach with a yelp. Logan tackled her once more, driving her muzzle first into a tree.

"Destroy it!" He yelled over his shoulder at me, fighting to hold on to her.

"What?" I called back uncertainly. It was hard to hear him over the pounding rain.

“The idol! Destroy it! Now!” Shayla screamed angrily, redoubling her efforts to get to me, eyes blazing with hate.

Fumbling clumsily, I dumped the bag on the ground and scrambled to uncover the terrible relic. It glared up at me and seemed to pulse with a slimy malicious aura. Scattering the fallen leaves, I searched for a big enough rock to break the idol with. Finally, my hand brushed against one, half buried in the earth. I fumbled at it frantically, ripping three fingernails as I fought to tear it out of the ground.

Raising the rock over my head, I bashed it down on the statuette. It shattered and an explosion of power threw me into the air. Shadows burst from the pieces, wiping out the light and casting me into blinding darkness. Somewhere nearby, Shayla screeched in agony and Logan roared. I never felt myself hit the ground.

Opening my eyes, I found myself standing in a field of grey. Dark, flat, unbroken grey stretched in every direction. The landscape was entirely uninterrupted, no trees, no mountains, no anything, just endless grey. Howls resonated around me and from one moment to the next, Logan’s pack appeared. They jumped at me, yipping frantically, before racing away into the shadowy world. Carol doubled back, mouthing at my hands and pulling my clothes, urging me to follow. An enraged bellow echoed in the distance.

Logan! I bolted after the dogs, Carol at my side. After feeling like I’d been running forever and getting nowhere, I spotted a pale blob of color on the horizon. It tumbled over the ground, resolving into a nude male body. A huge, hulking, monstrously deformed version of Beasty stalked after the rolling form. The naked man struggled to his feet, crouching defensively, and I recognized him.

“Logan!” I cried. The monster’s head whipped around at the sound and he grinned evilly, snarling in vicious delight. The pack reached the creature, leaping at it and tearing into its skin. Maddened, it roared, swiping at the dogs in return. Black lupine bodies flew through the air as the demon threw them off. I ran to Logan’s side while it was distracted.

“You shouldn’t be here!” He protested. “Get out while you can, I’ll keep it busy. Find a way out and escape the valley! Don’t come back!

Ever!” I shook my head at his order.

“I’m not leaving you,” I replied forcefully.

“You have to. I don’t think I can beat him, but hopefully I can distract him long enough for you to escape whatever this place is. You have to get out. You have to live, please,” he begged sorrowfully, placing a tender kiss on my forehead. I clutched at his arms.

“No, it’s just Beasty. You can beat him. You kept him under control for so long, I know you can beat him. I won’t leave you,” I said vehemently.

“That’s not Beasty,” he whispered worriedly. “Beasty’s still with me and he’s scared. Whatever that is, it’s worse.” Yelping drew our attention and a dark body tumbled passed us. The monster gave a harsh laugh as it flicked another dog away with a backhanded blow.

Nuisances. None of you will escape. I will consume you all, it spoke, eyeing us contemptuously. Its voice had changed again. Now the sound stabbed at my ears, grating in my head and making me wince. It was deeper and distinctly male.

“Why are you doing this Shayla?” Logan demanded, pushing me behind himself. The monster chuckled derisively.

There is no Shayla, it sneered. *There never was. She was merely a construct. A vessel to hold my essence on the physical plane so that I could stay close to my demon. I used her form to feed power into my tibicena, boosting his strength and building him to perfection. All those blackouts, all those times you lost control, all the rage and lust, that was my creature, my child, growing stronger and pushing your useless human soul further into the darkness until he could take full control and the beast was the only thing left. But you,* he hissed, turning to me. *You interfered. I nearly had him, mere days it was. If it weren’t for you, he would have given up by now and my tibicena would be free to walk the earth, reaping the souls of the living to feed me,* the monster snarled again, growing larger until it towered over us, easily fifteen feet in height. Logan stepped back, keeping himself between the demon and I.

“You keep saying ‘my tibicena,’ does that mean you’re Guayota?” Logan asked suspiciously.

Yesss, it hissed. *When you opened the Vault of Teide, you woke me. When you stole my child, you freed me. As thanks, I have remade you into my tibicena. You will roam the earth, bringing me the blood and souls of your prey. When I am strong enough once more, I will walk the lands and Magec will be mine again. Achaman is weak. He cannot stop me this time. His followers are gone, he has no power in this world.*

“I won’t go back to being that *thing*!” Logan declared. “I won’t be your beast again!” A sinister laugh rolled out from the monster’s chest.

When I break her, you will be anything I want you to be, it sniggered.

“You won’t touch her!” Logan exclaimed.

My powers may have been too weak in your dream world, but this is my world. Here I have the power and you are but a speck of dust. You cannot stop me, Guayota snarled in return. Logan’s pack had regained their feet and surrounded us defensively, growling a warning at the evil deity.

Pests, all of you, Guayota declared. A sweep of his paw and the ground rolled under us, knocking everyone over. The dogs jumped back up and went on the attack. Guayota treated each of them as the nuisance he’d judged them to be. Shaking them off like flies, he snapped out a hand and caught Danny mid-leap. *Nuisances,* the demon stated again, eyeing the snapping, twisting canine. *Nuisances, good only for one thing.*

I screamed at the sight of Guayota’s massive teeth suddenly ripping into Danny’s body. Contemptuously, he threw half of Danny’s carcass over his shoulder and leered at me, blood drooling out of his mouth. His jaws snapped again, crunching down on what was between his teeth. A bright light sparked and died as he crunched and swallowed a final time. A flare of red from his eyes and a shadowy aura seeped out of his skin.

The rest of the pack circled Guayota still, eyeing him warily now. Logan eased backwards in slow steps, slowly pushing me back as well. Despite our caution, Guayota still saw our movement and tracked us with his mad gaze, tittering evilly.

This is my world, he growled triumphantly. Waving one massive hand, black tendrils shot up from the ground. Carol and the pack yelped in terror as they were snatched off their feet.

"Carol!" I yelled, reaching uselessly for the animal that was too far away. Logan grabbed my wrist to stop me from running to her. Just as his hand closed on my arm, something slimy and malevolent wrapped around my waist. My eyes locked on Logan's and I was jerked into the air.

Chapter 50

Logan

"Michelle!" I screamed, trying to hold onto her. I fell forward as she was yanked away from me. Jumping to my feet, I tried to follow, but more of the evil tentacles rose from the ground and grabbed me as well, heaving me off my feet. Tightly wrapped around my limbs, I was stretched painfully, unable to fight or break free. Michelle shrieked in distress as the tendrils carried her to Guayota.

She kicked and twisted, futilely fighting the darkness that held her. The demon's hand closed around her upper body, nearly engulfing her in its massive, hairy fist. He squeezed and her breath squeaked out of her as her chest compressed. She gasped air in frantically when he released the pressure, allowing her to breathe again. More malicious laughter issued from the monster.

So soft. No wonder she appealed to both you and my beast, Guayota commented dryly, trailing a finger over her cheek.

"Let her go!" I begged. "It's me you want. Let her go and I'll be your tibicena. I'll give him full control. You'll never hear from me again; I'll just fade away."

"No Logan! You can't do that! You can't give up," Michelle protested. Her cry cut off when Guayota squeezed her again.

No, he drawled thoughtfully. *It won't work like that. The man and beast are too deeply intertwined now. Sacrificing yourself to save her is an act of good that can only influence my tibicena even more. I must destroy that which gives you hope, cast you to the deepest depths of misery and despair from which you can never emerge. I must remind my child of the joys of blood and flesh, so that he sings my song of death once more and serves me in all things,* Guayota swept his tongue over Michelle's face as his words trailed off.

"Oh! Ugh! Yuck!!" She sputtered.

So sweet and soft. The blood and the life call to me like no other. Fresh, warm, and so very fragile, he stated, looking at me with an ugly

grin.

“I swear to God, you hurt her and I’ll fucking kill you!!” I swore, struggling against my bonds.

Surprisingly, the beast in the back of my mind growled unhappily. He’d been quiet and subdued, fearful since Guayota had brought us to this dream world, but he was paying attention now. As far as he was concerned, he’d claimed her days ago, marked her with his essence. Little Bird belonged to him and he didn’t like Guayota touching her.

You cannot stop me, the deity mocked, giggling manically. His claws dragged down her body, ripping through her clothes and drawing thin bloody lines in her delicate flesh as they cut through the flimsy layers. Michelle cried out in pain.

“Bastard!! I’m going to rip your head off!” I strained harder, pulling at my restraints with a snarl. Beasty growled with me. *If you want her back, you have to decide who’s side you’re really on,* I shouted at him. The beast’s thoughts turned uncertain. He wanted the girl, craved contact with her, but Guayota was his creator, his father and master. *If you don’t help me, he will kill her! If we win, we get to keep her! Which scenario would you rather have?* Michelle screamed again as Guayota licked the blood that oozed from her wounds. Her clothing hung in shreds now, his claws digging shallow furrows in her skin.

The beast inside me decided. He had seen enough; the little bird was his and he wasn’t letting her go. Roaring in rage, he burst through my skin. The sheer size and strength of the beast tore the tendrils holding us and we hit the ground in a crouch. Beasty raised our head to snarl at his creator.

“Little Bird is mine,” we hissed angrily. Guayota’s eyes narrowed and he paused in his tormenting of our female.

What are you doing child? He growled warningly at us. *You are my spawn. You will not defy me.*

“She is mine! Give her back!” Our voices echoing together in a snarl of anger.

I see I must break you first. I will break you until you can do nothing but watch as I take her body, her mind, and then…her life, the demon

purred menacingly. Almost negligently, he cast Michelle behind him. We watched her land hard and tumble across the ground to lay motionless where she stopped. Beasty whined worriedly under our breath.

Easy there, big guy, we gotta deal with him first, I said soothingly, keeping a close eye on the evil god standing between ourselves and Michelle. Beasty's attention shifted back to the threat in front of us. Guayota sneered scornfully at us.

Beasty howled a challenge, digging his claws into the ground as we prepared to charge. Guayota drew his power back into his body, dropping the pack abruptly. Yelping at the sudden impact, they scrambled to their feet and retreated from the demon, grouping protectively around Michelle.

Inhumanly fast, the monstrous deity leaped at us, trailing shadows in his wake. Claws extended, he slashed, aiming for our face. Beasty dodged to the side, snapping his fangs at the being's arm as it sailed passed us. We missed and Beasty growled in frustration as we whipped around to face Guayota again.

Let me fight! He bellowed at me.

What? I am! I replied.

No! You hinder me! You fight me for control! You always have! Give me control, let me fight! Beasty snarled as we circled to keep the demon god in front of us. The monster lunged once more, forcing us to jump out of reach again. Beasty slashed at Guayota's face, ripping a bit of hair from his muzzle but overall, doing no significant damage.

Let me fight! Beasty demanded again. We caught a swing of the demon's paw, throwing us down.

This is my body, I snapped as we scrambled to our feet. *I'm not giving it to you.*

Then we will lose! Just let me use it, unfettered. We can't save Little Bird if you don't, Beasty stated, ducking another swing.

Her name is Michelle and I won't let you hurt her, I warned.

Don't want to hurt, never hurt. Not anymore, he replied tiredly. *Little B…Michelle special. She needs us. Let me fight…please Logan,*

Beasty pleaded. I felt none of his previous obsessive greed and lust for Michelle through our link. Only a desire to protect her that matched my own. He didn't yet understand love or hope as I did, but he liked how they felt when he felt them through me. Maybe it was worth the risk.

Do it, but know this. I'll kill us both before you get a chance to hurt her again, I threatened. I stepped back, mentally, reluctantly releasing the tight grip I'd always struggled to maintain on Beasty's presence in my soul. He felt it when I let go and roared again, louder and fiercer than ever. His limbs lengthened, claws sharpening and curving wickedly. Fangs grew needle sharp and his eyes glowed a sinister red, much brighter than before. Guayota laughed.

Very good my child, he chuckled. *You've tricked the fool mortal into giving you control. Now, destroy him completely. Take her, take your Little Bird and satisfy the lusts he's denied you for too long. Consume her and be done with the last bit of his interference!* Guayota ordered gleefully. Beasty growled again.

"Her…name…is…Michelle," he panted defiantly, the effort to speak putting a strain on his voice. The pack ran forward and surrounded us, leaving only Carol standing over Michelle. One by one, Beasty touched them and they changed. Morphing into a brilliant white light, they merged with Beasty's body, feeding power into him, making him bigger, stronger. It took only seconds for Beasty to double in size, standing slightly taller than Guayota now. "Your power is limited this far from Teide," Beasty snarled at the other monster, who stepped back defensively. Guayota glared, studying us suspiciously.

Beasty attacked, driving claws first into Guayota. We crashed to the ground in a snapping, screaming tangle. Teeth clamped down on Beasty's arm, nearly crunching into bone, but not breaking it. We bellowed in pain and defiance. Beasty turned, biting into Guayota's neck, drawing blood and ripping muscle and flesh.

The angle was bad though and the demon tore free, releasing Beasty's arm. He hacked at Beasty's face with his claws and we reared back to avoid losing an eye. We took a blow across the chest that left gashes from shoulder to flank. Returning the attack, we scored across the

devil’s face, tearing an eye from his skull with a sickly, wet noise. The fiend screeched in agony and lunged forward, biting our thigh as we twisted away from it. Muscle ripped and the leg shook, weakened. Blood slicked the ground beneath us, making our footing unstable.

Beasty roared in pain and punched Guayota’s muzzle and ear until he released his grip. He pushed away from us, but failed to avoid Beasty’s counter strike. Our claws opened ugly furrows down the deity’s back, catching on the bone and narrowly missing his spine. It stumbled, hunching warily.

Panting heavily, blood flowed freely from deep wounds on both our bodies. Sometime in the fight, Beasty had taken a slash to the face that barely missed our eye. It wasn’t as bad as Guayota’s injury, but it stung and bled into the eye, blurring our vision. Beasty scowled at the fallen god, looking for an opening to attack again.

“Mmmm, Logan?” Michelle’s sweet voice called groggily. Head snapping up at the sound, both Beasty and I were horrified to realize that during the fight we’d gotten turned around. Guayota now stood between us and our female once more. He grinned evilly and spun, bolting for the defenseless girl.

“No!” We shouted, racing after him.

Chapter 51

Michelle

I came to at the worst possible time, I thought, seeing the bloody monster bearing down on me. I was shocked to see a second beastly form behind him, but then it shouted and I heard both Beasty and Logan in its voice. There was no time for me to dodge, even if I could get my battered body to cooperate. Instead, I panicked.

“BEASTY!” I screamed, cowering and closing my eyes with a cringe.

Snarls, a rush of air, and a splatter of wet warmth on my skin. Something heavy thudded down nearby, shaking the ground with its impact. I scrambled away from the sound of flesh hitting flesh and the thrashing of bodies. Carol pushed me further, guiding me to a safer distance.

Wide-eyed now, I watched as Beasty pinned Guayota to the earth and pummeled him mercilessly. Raining blow after blow, bite after bite, clawing chunks of flesh out of the struggling deity. Guayota barely fought back except as an attempt to escape, but the ground was too slick and Beasty’s attack too vicious, he couldn’t get any leverage. He was weakening. Twisting onto his belly, the demon god tried to heave my protector off, but Beasty locked his arms around Guayota’s neck, bending him backwards at an undoubtedly painful angle.

“The girl is mine,” Beasty snarled. “You can’t have her. You can’t have me,” he announced decisively.

Guayota flailed, clutching desperately at Beasty’s arms. With a twisting wrench, Beasty snapped the monster’s neck. Guayota’s muscles went limp, body twitching uncontrollably under Beasty, who held on until the last tremors faded.

Dropping the corpse finally, he settled back on his heels to catch his breath. I winced at the sound of Guayota’s skull thudding into the ground. A high wind whisked through the dreamscape suddenly, blowing the shreds

of shadow and darkness away in swirls. The fiend's body dissolved in the wind, disintegrating to dust and crumbling away.

Beasty growled warningly, eyes darting around in search of a new threat. He was bigger and scarier than I'd ever seen him. His eyes weren't just red, they gleamed crazily. Bloody drool hung in ropes from his muzzle and his claws dripping scarlet. I shivered in dread when his eyes landed on me. Beasty's gaze was intense and feral, with no sign of Logan behind them. He growled under his breath and I flinched involuntarily.

"Beasty?" I whispered uncertainly as he lumbered to his feet and stalked towards me. Carol stepped in his way, growling fiercely. Her hackles raised as she challenged him directly. Snarling in response, he raised a hand to smack her out of his way. "Beasty! No!" I yelled, throwing my arms around her. Beasty's growl turned to a whine overhead. Looking up, I was stunned when he lowered his arm, shaking his head wearily. Obviously exhausted, he dropped onto his butt and slumped, watching me tiredly. His eyes, though still red, no longer glowed so strangely.

"That you, Beasty?" I asked, cautiously stepping closer. He blinked at me, then nodded wordlessly. "You ok?" Another tired nod, but he slowly rolled to all fours. Giving himself a hard shake, he flung blood and drool out of his fur. Amazingly, he also shook a trio of lights from his body. He shrank as they left him, finally returning to the form I was familiar with. The lights touched the ground and transformed. Each one turning back into a large black canine, revealing where the rest of the pack had disappeared to.

Beasty was normal sized again, but still different, more animal than before as he crouched on his heels. Red eyes continued to watch me with a tired but alert gaze. Blood oozed from his wounds and he shivered with fatigue. Carefully, I stepped closer, watching for a reaction. Beasty just waited.

"Beasty? Where's Logan? Is he in there too?" Beasty's head drooped as he nodded. *Poor thing,* I thought. *He's absolutely worn out.* His wounds worried me enough that I finally walked all the way up to him, wanting to check on him.

He stayed still until I was in arm's reach, then yanked me into a hug, burying his face in my hair like he always did. The feel of blood and fur on my naked skin reminded me that my clothes had been virtually destroyed, again. I sighed, wrapping my arms around his neck and returning his hug. Beasty sighed heavily and relaxed against me. Muscles and fur shrank away, leaving me holding a naked, bloody Logan who collapsed, dragging me down with him.

"Logan! Oh my God! Are you okay?" I blurted, trying to keep from crashing into the ground. He grunted wordlessly in response. A warmth settled over us as light filled the air.

He is well, my child, a gentle voice answered, filling the air with a comforting feeling.

"Who…who are you?" I asked anxiously, protectively tightening my arms around Logan. A quiet chuckle bubbled through the landscape.

I was once worshipped as the Father God and creator of this world. Now I am mostly forgotten, my people lost to the ashes of time. I am Achaman. Where Guayota is darkness, I am Light. Where He is Death, I am Life, the voice explained.

"If you're here, why didn't you stop Guayota? Logan told me the legends say you defeated him and locked him in Teide. Why did you let him do all this?" I questioned angrily. The voice sighed.

Were this still my world, I could have. My worshippers are long gone, my power limited to the remnants of that culture and the few people, like your Logan, who search for lost civilizations. This world belongs mostly to the One God, for now. His followers are numerous and cover the lands from ocean to ocean and beyond. There are also other deities who claim portions of this world, but the One God claims the most. Guayota only made it this far from our homelands because of his tibicena. When your lover brought it out of Teide, he released some of Guayota's essence and carried it here. I could not stop him, but I was able to follow, as the young female you know as Carol had also brought something from the vault.

I did what I could when Guayota first attacked. I could not save his friends. They're life essences were stolen to feed the tibicena's link to Guayota, but I harvested their souls and remade them into the animals you see before you.

Neither they nor I could directly interfere with Guayota, I had not the power to do so, but their mere presence was enough, for a time. Were he completely alone, he would have lost his mind long before you arrived.

When you entered his life, I enabled you to share your dreams with him, to dream-walk in his mind, so that you might help him find himself again. I did what I was able, I could do no more. A surge of warmth and Dante's lupine form staggered into existence, wide eyed and anxious. He circled searchingly and then shook himself, relaxing into a doggy grin. *They have served their purpose and will return to the other side with me. The rest is up to you.*

"What about Logan and Beasty? The tibicena is still in there isn't he?"

Yes, my child. The black dog of Guayota lives within him. It has chosen mortality with you over immortal servitude to the God of Darkness. Logan accepted the responsibility of carrying the entity in order to protect you. They are now one.

The tibicena has never been forced to share a human soul before. It has never known the emotions Logan has exposed it to. Your lover has taught the demon offspring of the God of Chaos much about humanity and love. In choosing you, they have broken the link to Guayota. It is free of his evil. Achaman's serene voice washed over us, a disembodied wave of soothing energy, lending strength and healing to us both.

"Guayota's not dead, is he?"

No, like others of our kind, he cannot die. We merely lose our ability to interact with the world on a physical plane. Our powers are only as strong as our connection to the people. When no one believes, there are no prayers, no offerings, no sacrifices. No transfer of life energy. Nothing to lend us the power we need to remain constant on this plane. The tibicena was Guayota's last bastion of power. He has no others.

Now that it has abandoned him and destroyed his construct, Guayota has no hold here. Your Beasty destroyed his physical vessel, he no longer has the power to make a new one. It will be a long time before he can regain even a modicum of the power I currently hold. Before that happens, I will have him sealed back in Teide and unable to return to this plane of existence. You will not encounter him again, Achaman stated reassuringly.

"What now?" I asked, aware of Logan's arm curling tighter around me.

That, my child, is entirely up to you, but my power is waning and I must return these souls to their proper place before it fades. Achaman's presence faded, his light coalescing into a bright orb that hung patiently in the air. Each pack member stepped forward and brushed its nose against Logan's shoulder in goodbye. I received a lick on the cheek from each of the four males, then a cuddle from Carol. She pressed against me in a gesture that had become so familiar in the last weeks. Once the farewells were done, they turned and trotted into the light. The fluffy, loveable, four-legged forms I'd come to care so much about turned bipedal just as they disappeared for the last time.

The light flared, blinding me. As it faded, sound returned. Birds chirped; trees rustled overhead. Color followed; greens and browns, a touch of yellow, then blue and grey. Lastly the landscape reformed, capturing color in the shapes of rocks and trees, the ugly, wrecked Jeep, until we were kneeling in the clearing once more. My clothes were in shreds, hanging from my frame and I shivered in the chilly, wet breeze.

Strong hands smoothed across my back, reminding me that I held Logan against me still. His eyes opened and that beautiful brilliant green was unblemished by the red insanity that had been there for so long. Instead, Beasty's presence showed in the halo of hazel around the outside edge of his iris.

"Hey there, Tiny Dancer," he whispered with a smile.

"Hey there, Beast man," I teased. Logan grinned wider and a flash of color across his eyes told me Beasty was paying attention too, though the hazel didn't linger, fading to green again.

Logan stiffened, pulling away from me to look at himself in disbelief. In wide eyed wonder, he inspected each of his hands from the dirty broken nails to the scars on his forearms. Then with a look of concentration, his fingers sprouted claws and fur, eyes glimmering hazel again before reverting to normal.

He was human again and somehow, despite having walked beside him in our dreams, I had never realized just how big he was. His shoulders were muscular and nearly twice the width of my own. Sitting with him made it hard to tell, but I estimated he could be as much as six and a half feet tall.

He was wilder than his dream self. Matted, unkempt, dirty, black hair hung down his back in dreads. A scruffy beard covered much of his face, but failed to hide the scars he sported from his fight with Guayota. Looking at myself, I noticed that I also sported a few faint scars down my body. His body was lean and would have looked bony if it weren't for the amount of muscle he still sported on his frame. A flash of blue twinkled on his chest.

"My ballerina!" It hung from a dirty black ribbon, excessively loose since it had been sized to Beasty's neck.

"Oh. Yeah, I, well we, found it a while ago, but Beasty wanted to keep it."

"My dad gave me that, he bought it for my first recital. I was too little to remember it, but I've always had it." I ran my fingers over the shiny trinket.

"Here, take it," Logan announced, grabbing the ribbon to return it. I flattened my hand on top of it, stopping him.

"No, it's very important to me. I want you to have it, both of you. You are both important to me now," I said, watching the warm flash of hazel in Logan's green eyes. Logan smiled softly, closing his hand over mine and the little ballerina.

"I don't understand. Where is Guayota? I must have blacked out. What happened?" He asked finally.

“Oh, just a few things,” I chuckled, wrapping him in a hug once more.

Chapter 52

Logan

"So, what do we do now?" I questioned after Michelle filled me in on everything I missed, including her conversation with an ancient deity I never would have thought was real. Of course, none of what happened should have been real or possible, but I was living proof.

"Achaman said that's up to us. You are free of Guayota's curse, mostly. Beasty will be a part of you for the rest of your life, but you don't have to fight him anymore. We can walk to that ranger's station you mentioned, get some help. We can go home, let your family know you're alive. Let mine know I'm ok too," she said calmly.

"I've been missing so long, years I know. What year is it anyways?" I asked.

"It's 2020."

"My God. The last year I remember is 2011. I've been gone nearly ten years. They'll have declared me dead by now. And what about Carol and the others? How do I explain all this? How do I explain any of it?"

"By being as truthful as possible without mentioning curses, transformations, or evil gods," she said frankly. "You were in a landslide and wrecked. You suffered a head injury and have been lost in the mountains all this time, somehow you ended up at your granddad's cabin. The others died in the wreck; their bodies were scavenged by animals. You show signs of having been attacked by some of the animals that live in these woods. There are bears in the mountains, wolves, cougars, etcetera. I wrecked in that awful storm weeks back, you found me, saved my life and somehow, I helped you regain your memories and we left the cabin together. All of that is the truth, it's not as fantastical as the complete truth, but it is the truth. Your family needs to know you're alive. Your friends' families need to know what happened to them too," Michelle finished with a wave at whatever remains were left.

“You’re right. They need to know. It’s time my friends were laid to rest. They deserve that much at least. They were loyal, even when I didn’t know who they were,” I sighed.

“I can guarantee it will be crazy for a while, you’ll be something of a celebrity. There will be lots of questions and investigations and doubts, but I’ll be there with you, every step of the way,” she stated reassuringly. “I love you.”

“All of me?” I asked, letting Beasty’s hazel flash across my eyes.

“Yes, all of you,” Michelle answered firmly, leaning in to kiss me.

My hands slid around her back to pull her closer as I angled into the kiss. Licking at her lips, I urged her to open for me. She did and I dipped my tongue into her mouth, stroking and teasing hers. Sharp little finger nails dug into my shoulders where her hands gripped me and a growl purred out of my chest that wasn’t all me. She broke the kiss with a laugh and looked into my eyes again. I knew she saw a touch of Beasty there. Kissing me again, she leaned in and nipped my bottom lip with a playful little growl of her own. In a rush of motion, I suddenly shoved her to her back, crouching over her. With obvious effort, I forced my body to stop moving.

She wants us! Beasty complained. *We will fill her and give her our seed!*

Not like that, I chastised. *Human females like more than just a hard fuck.*

There is more? He asked, confused.

Big guy, there is so much more to sex and love than just fucking, I chuckled. Beasty was quiet as he thought this over.

Show me, he demanded, withdrawing slightly to watch. Opening eyes I hadn’t realized I’d closed, I found Michelle watching me patiently, her hands brushing lightly over my upper arms.

“You ok?” She asked.

“Yeah, just needed to set some things straight upstairs,” I smiled, tapping the side of my head.

“You guys will hammer out the details as you go, I’m sure,” she grinned. Her fingertips skimmed up my shoulders to my neck and along my collarbones, leaving goosebumps in their wake.

Copying her, I skated my fingers across her lips, down her neck, and over her collarbone. She gave a little mew of sound, fidgeting under my touch. Her top was tattered and barely clinging to her body. I twisted my fingers around the material and pulled. The fabric tore easily, Michelle uttered the sweetest gasp at the sound, shivering under me.

“You do that a lot,” she laughed, the sound husky and appreciative.

Pushing the pieces aside, I continued my journey over her skin. Nipples pebbling as I circled the rosy pearls, I caught one between my fingers. Her body arched gently as I played with her pretty tit, before cupping her soft breast and holding it so I could lean in to lick the hard, little tip. I lapped it a few times, drawing my tongue over it in long swipes, then sucked the nipple into my mouth, worrying it gently between my teeth.

Tiny murmurs of pleasure escaped her lips. Leaving the first wet and swollen, I lavished the same attention on the other until she was panting under me. Sliding my hand down the soft curve of her belly, I dipped my fingers between her thighs. She was hot and wet, arching against my palm as I feathered through the curls that hid her sweetness. Stroking her clit, I rose up to watch her face. Her hands clutched at my shoulders, body bowing upwards when I plunged my fingers into her pussy. Gasping prettily, she smiled as I stroked her inner walls. Withdrawing my hand, her gaze widened a little as she watched me lick her essence from my fingers.

I remember this taste, Beasty groaned blissfully. I kissed Michelle, pushing my tongue between her lips so she tasted herself as well. She moaned, brushing her leg against my hip, urging me closer. Instead, I pulled away and peppered kisses down her body, not stopping until I pushed her thighs apart with my shoulders. Spreading her open, I fell upon her hungrily. Her hands caught at my hair and her legs tensed shakily, forcing me to hold them apart as I lapped at her folds.

Alternating long licks from the base of her slit to her clit with thrusts of my tongue inside her sheath, I drove her to a frenzy. She keened, crying out when I nipped her thigh. Lapping her clit again, Beasty growled in my head and the possessive sound burst from my lips to vibrate against her. She seized, screaming my name and shuddering with her release.

Scooping my arms under her shoulders, I rose up and sank my cock into her heat before her tremors eased. Wrapping her legs around my hips, she hooked her ankles behind my back as I buried myself fully in her trembling body. Panting, she arched under me in a new wave of spasms, taking me deeper with a helpless moan of pleasure. My eyes felt like they wanted to roll back with bliss, but I forced them to stay on the sensual creature under me. The dream sex we'd shared had been amazing, but this was real. And real was so much more. Beasty growled impatiently and I found myself stroking in and out of her before I'd planned on moving.

Impatient much? I asked.

Our female feels like paradise and you are wasting it, he replied tersely.

I was savoring the moment you hotheaded monster, I countered, wrestling for control again. Beasty was enthusiastic but sloppy. Michelle didn't seem to care though, she pushed against me, rolling with every thrust, whimpering and shivering incoherently.

I kept our motion strong and smooth until I felt her tensing again, her orgasm not far off. Only then did I give Beasty a little of our control. With a snarl of excitement that had Michelle shuddering delightedly, he took over. Harder, faster, deeper, he slammed into her. Digging fingers into her hips to hold on, he thrust hard enough that our skin slapped loudly against hers.

"Oh! Oh God! Fuck! Yes! Yes!" She chanted helplessly, nails digging furrows in our back, Beasty and I both cursed at the sensation. My balls tightened, solid and heavy, the ache making my head throb. I shook with the strain of holding back. Beasty snarled angrily, wanting to cum. I forced a hand between us and ground my thumb over Michelle's clit. She shrieked wordlessly, body rigid and bowed as she broke apart. Her tight pussy clamped down on my dick and triggered our own orgasm. Roaring,

Beasty pounded into Michelle as her inner muscles spasmed and milked every bit out of me. Then he pulled her close and bit her shoulder with a feral growl. She gasped loudly and spasmed again as our thrusts slowed but didn't stop until I was too soft to do more. I collapsed on her, pushing her into the muddy ground. Her arms held me tight while we struggled to catch our breath.

"That wasn't just you was it?" She asked finally, still panting lightly.

"No," I admitted. "Are you okay with sharing?" Raising up a little, I watched as she thought it over.

"Yeah," she said after a moment. "I love you, and Beasty's not so bad when he behaves and uses his manners," she joked. "The two of you share the same body, he's a part of you and I do care about him. I suppose I may even love him too. I don't know if I'd ever be okay with you going furry during sex, but I'm okay with him taking the lead once in a while, as long as you're in there too. I liked the growling and the biting; you can teach him a little finesse. To be honest, it was pretty exciting switching between your very different styles," she admitted shyly, fingers gliding gently over my skin. Beasty grumbled sleepily at me and I laughed into her shoulder.

"What?" Michelle asked suspiciously.

"Beasty says we should teach you just how exciting 'furry' fucking can be. Especially after a good hunt," I laughingly explained.

"Maybe one day," she chuckled, pecking me on the cheek.

"Let's go back to the cabin," I suggested. "We're both muddy as hell now. We should clean up and see if we can find something to wear before trying to hike out of here. I imagine it will take some time to get our lives back in order.

"As long as we're together," Michelle promised with a kiss.

Epilogue

Michelle

It took nearly a year. Eleven long months of questions and investigations, searchers combing the valley and collecting evidence, physical exams and mental evaluations. Logan and his friends had been missing for almost a decade.

When they first disappeared, Logan's family had searched the valley, knowing how important the cabin was to him. The valley had been empty, no sign of Logan or the carful of remains. The landslide had been overlooked, as had the wreck. No one could explain how, they just were. Heartbroken, they'd never returned to the valley and it had fallen into disrepair.

With the curse broken, the wreck was found and Logan's friends were recovered and declared dead as a result of either the accident or predation by a large animal, likely a bear. Partial remains of all five of them were located and returned to their families for burial.

Logan's ten-year survival "wandering the mountain wilds with amnesia" story was a media circus and I was heralded as the heroine of the day for restoring his memory and bringing him home. Despite the insanity of the investigations and the media, we still made time to see each other and meet each other's families.

Many of the first weeks were spent at a hospital where they poked and prodded at Logan. Running tests and evaluating his state of mind as they tried to determine how he'd lost his memory for so long. They wondered how he'd maintained his good health, but attributed it to his previous knowledge of nature and survival. No one could explain why his once auburn hair grew in black now, but they finally decided it had to be because of something in his diet over the last several years.

For obvious reasons, Beasty stayed hidden, buried deep inside Logan's mind. He understood that showing himself could get Logan locked up for a very long time and he was in no hurry to return to captivity. Outside of visiting hours, I lived in the waiting room and stayed

inside with Logan during. He knew I was never far. Dylan helped, bringing me clothes and toiletries until Logan was finally released.

His family spent days just crying on us both. Maggie did indeed give the warmest, smooshiest hugs I'd ever received and told me in no uncertain terms that I should call her mom. His dad was a gruff grumbly man who squeezed the breath out of me and told his son he would be a fool to let me get away after everything that had happened. We laughed and told him not to worry about that. Logan also had two brothers and a sister who traveled in to see us. We spent days basking in familial warmth, which was a relief after the visit with my mother.

Harboring an aversion to illness and hospitals, she had refused to come to us. As a result, we had to go to her. Seeing her had been a trying experience for us both. While she was happy to see me, my mother spent so much more time lamenting my missed audition and the setback to my career, that I wondered if coming back was really worth it. She barely acknowledged Logan or our experience and we left soon after she began making plans to get me back into training, talking about the next series of auditions coming up.

My reunion with Dylan was the homecoming she couldn't give me. He and Roger were the first to arrive at the hospital, crying and thankful to see us both. Dylan visited daily, bringing necessities and treats. After Logan's release, they demanded we come by as soon as we finished at my mom's.

We walked into his apartment to cheers and showers of confetti as he'd rounded up several friends and threw a surprise party to celebrate. Logan laughed as Dylan flirted outrageously with him, comically squeezing his muscles and bemoaning the fact that he had never come across Logan in the last few visits he'd made to his dad's cabin which was only a few miles away. I felt obliged to point out that I'd never have found Logan either if I hadn't gotten lost and turned down the wrong road in the storm.

As far as our careers were concerned, we both decided to take some time away from everything. I happily gave up my professional career. As much as I loved to dance, being a part of the company had never quite

suited me. After a bit of a vacation, I might open a studio and teach. Logan's family couldn't care less what we did, they were just happy to have him back. I had to stop answering the phone whenever my mother called.

Staunchly refusing to declare him dead, his family had put his things in storage and his money in the care of a trusted financial manager who invested wisely and put the profits in a high interest trust for his return. In other words, Logan was loaded. Having been missing less than three weeks, I wasn't so lucky, but it didn't bother me a bit, I had a modest savings account that left me securely cushioned against the need to work for at least a little while.

There'd been a few close calls where Beasty's tension had caused him to come way too close to showing himself. Especially when the next-door neighbor's obnoxious Pomeranians acted like assholes towards Logan. Getting to know him without Guayota and Shayla driving him mad had made me realize what a sweetheart he really was and I really did love Beasty as much as I loved Logan.

At night, Beasty came out and curled around me as we slept, holding me close like a cherished teddy bear. The rest of the time he had to spend hidden away inside Logan. It was hard on them both. As it was, he had a very difficult time controlling himself during sex. I had received more than a few scratches on my skin from his claws as he struggled to respect my previous "no fur" edict. Not that I minded knowing I drove him crazy, but it wasn't fair to him.

I felt like it was time to make a few changes. I wanted both Logan and Beasty to know just how much I loved them. There was also something big they needed to know. I just wasn't entirely sure how to bring the subject up with them.

For now though, we found ourselves back in the valley where we'd begun. We were looking forward to claiming it as a more permanent home. It was private here and Beasty needed room to roam freely, otherwise he drove Logan crazy with the constant fear of being trapped. After all the attention we'd been receiving, we wanted somewhere quiet to ourselves.

The cabin itself had suffered terribly from neglect and we made the decision to tear it down and rebuild. We wanted bigger, sturdier, and more modern. The plan was to live here for at least a large portion of the year. The road had been updated already, but the cabin was taking longer.

“The builders won’t be done for another six or seven months, depending on how bad the winter weather gets. If the snow gets too deep, they’ll have to stop for a while,” Logan commented after speaking with the foreman. We stood on the edge of the now much larger clearing, watching workers scurrying about. The framework for both floors was assembled and the outer walls were mostly done. A roofing team hauled sheet metal up the sides and we could see technicians inside working on wiring and plumbing.

The weather was nice today. Dry and sunny, a pleasant breeze ruffled my hair as it swirled around us. It was a really good day for my surprise. Both surprises actually.

“That might be cutting it close,” I mused, passing a hand over my still flat belly. Logan’s eyes grew wide and he smiled broadly as he caught my meaning. Then the bright green gave way to warm hazel and Beasty looked out. Cocking his head in confusion, he peered curiously at me.

“He says you should tell me?” Beasty grumbled questioningly. I took his hand and pressed it against my stomach.

“We’re having a baby,” I whispered, cupping his cheek. He startled, looking rather horrified, and pulled away from me. His eyes flashed abruptly green again. Logan laughed uproariously and swung me into his arms.

“What just happened?” I asked worriedly. Logan chuckled again.

“You, my tiny dancer, just scared the Hell out of the big bad wolf. He’s gone into hiding and swears he’s never touching you again,” he explained.

“Why would he say that?” I pouted, feeling a little hurt.

“Because he’s afraid he’ll hurt you and the baby by accident,” Logan stated with another chuckle. “He’s even ordering me not to lay a hand on you.”

“Aw Beasty. I was hoping you might want to play. We’ll just have to show you how tough a pregnant girl can be,” I said grabbing Logan’s hand and pulling him into the trees. “And I know just how to start.” Strong arms wrapped around my waist, drawing my back snug against his torso.

“Will you dance for us, Little Bird?” Logan asked, whispering in my ear.

“I might even sing for you. If only my big bad Beasty can catch me,” I teased, turning to face him. Hazel edged Logan’s green eyes, interest flaring in their depths. Spinning away with a giggle and a twirl of my skirt, I dashed off into the trees, headed for the creek we’d visited not so long ago. Beasty growled in delight and gave chase.

Beasty

My little bird laughed and darted away from the clearing, taunting me to follow. Her arousal already perfumed the air, setting my mouth to watering. Logan gave control over to me, bowing to the better hunter. I rumbled in pleasure at the thought of catching my female.

Jogging casually to give her a small head start, I stalked along the blatant trail she left. If it weren’t for Michelle’s aversion to fur, I would already be myself, but she preferred Logan’s smooth, naked skin. Logan’s body was strong and fit and I enjoyed making use of it with Michelle, but I itched to shed it for my own.

She doesn’t have an aversion to fur, ya big idiot, Logan chided me as we tracked our female. *She just needed time to come around to the idea. She likes your fur well enough when you’re cuddling her remember?*

She has had all this time to accept the idea and has said nothing, I retorted. Logan laughed, the sound spilling out of our mouth in a low chuckle.

You weren’t listening, were you? He asked.

Of course I was. What was he prattling about when I was busy tracking my female?

*If you were, you would have heard her when she challenged **you** to catch her, not me,* Logan drawled knowingly. I paused, thinking back. A thrill blossomed in me and my lips curled back in a feral grin.

She did, didn't she? I chuffed under my breath.

Yup. Go get her tiger, Logan encouraged. I growled excitedly and flexed, bursting through Logan's skin. I'd forgotten the clothes he wore would be too small and the sudden rip of fabric filled the air. Logan laughed again. The only thing I wore now was Michelle's blue ballerina on a strong chain around my neck. We never took it off.

My true form was so much better at hunting. My perceptions were keener. My hearing and sense of smell heightened ten-fold. With my eyesight sharper and not limited in color like a true dog's, I could pick out even the faintest traces of her passing. Dropping to all fours, I sniffed out her delicious scent and loped after her.

A swatch of pink in the leaf litter was glaring to my eyes. Picking it up I discovered my mate had shed her undergarment. It was silky soft and saturated in her slick arousal. My eyes rolled back momentarily as I inhaled the decadent smell. A thrumming growl started up in my chest and I raced to find my female.

A rustle in the brush ahead of me made my ears twitch. A flash of pale skin and a little giggle in answer to my growl as she darted around a tree. Her breath already panting from running. She splashed across the creek, leaving her dress on the bank. I changed direction, speeding up and circling around ahead of her. She burst into the next clearing and I pounced.

Michelle

I knew he was right on my heels and it exhilarated me. Beasty had been so cranky lately. Furry snuggling at home only helped a little when he had been used to having free rein of his body. Now he was forced to share and, unfortunately, Logan got the most use out of it. This was his turn to be free. This was his forest. Here, he was the hunter and I was his prey. I grinned in excitement.

Sneakily, I dropped the panties I'd already slipped off before I instigated this chase. Recognizing my surroundings, I veered down into the creek bed, water splashing around my knees as I crossed, I flung my dress down on the bank. A loud growl rolled through the air behind me and I grinned. My Beasty had finally come out to play. Stifling a laugh, I scrambled up the other side of the stream. Light filtered through the trees ahead.

The trees opened into a small clearing, no more than a dozen feet across. Just as I stepped through the last trees, Beasty crashed through the brush on the other side. Skidding to a halt, I froze breathlessly. Beasty's appearance had improved so much in the months since he won his freedom from Guayota.

His pain had disappeared and he no longer walked with a limp. The hunched posture he'd had was gone, he stood straight and tall in front of me. Glossy, black fur lay smooth on his body, shining in the sunlight, and his tail was a healthy plume of silk. A low rumble purred out of his chest as he crouched, staring at me, the heaving of my naked bosom drawing his gaze.

Lunging for me, he broke the frozen moment and I turned with a laugh, darting behind the nearest tree. He growled again and swung agilely around the trunk, nipping at my heels. I squeaked gleefully, jumping over a fallen branch. Warm arms wrapped snugly around my body and we tumbled to the ground, Beasty turning to land with me atop his torso.

"Got you," he said smugly, a triumphant grin on his muzzle as I peered over my shoulder at him.

"Yes, you did," I conceded. "Now what are you going to do with me?" With a growl, he flipped us over, pinning me face down in the scratchy-soft leaf litter. Burying his muzzle in my hair, he nipped my neck drawing a gasp from me.

"I'm going to eat you," he whispered, licking the tender spot. My fingers gripped handfuls of leaves as he licked again. His tongue slid slowly up the center of my spine, drawing shivers from me.

"Beasty," I protested, groaning.

“Shh, Little Bird. I just need a taste,” he murmured. I gasped again, panting at the reminder of our first encounter. Now the memory had a whole new flavor to it. The feel of his claws trailing lightly over my skin had me quivering delightedly. Adding nips here and there, he licked his way from my ear to my buttocks, where his tongue dipped into the crack of my ass, making me jerk away with a giggle. He growled, seizing my hips with his hands and yanking my ass up higher. I squeaked at the sudden movement and he froze, breath heaving forcefully.

“Beasty?” I asked, rocking back on my knees. His hand on my lower back stilled me. Glancing over my shoulder again, I saw lust, desire, and uncertainty waring in his eyes.

“Not…hurting you?” He asked worriedly, panting raggedly.

“Aw, no Beasty. You’re not hurting me, I was enjoying that,” I smiled at him.

“The baby?” He carefully stroked his hand over my hip.

“You aren’t going to hurt me, or the baby, but if you don’t do something soon, we might need to get Logan back out here.” Beasty curled his lip with a growl. “Since you seem to have forgotten what to do with that dick of yours,” I goaded, waggling my ass at him. He growled again, lunging forward to cover my back with his huge hairy body.

“We don’t need the bare-skinned male right now,” he snarled, snugging me into the curve of his torso. One arm wrapped tightly around my hips, the other braced himself over me. Huge knees straddled my legs, his hips cradling my ass. I could feel his extruded dick nestled between my butt cheeks, a hot sticky weight against me. His upper body pressed me back into the forest floor. “Stay put,” he ordered with a hiss. Backing off me again, he nipped my hip when I squirmed at the feel of his fur sliding along my skin.

His tongue returned, laving a path down my back again. Still braced on one hand, he ran his other fingers over my curves, dipping into the dimples above my butt, then framing my hip as he held me steady. Beasty sniffed at my seeping pussy, already wet with need. He shuddered, groaning appreciatively at my scent. Then his nose delved between my

folds and he licked me from mound to asshole, dragging the entire surface of his tongue over my clit.

“O-oh! Shit!” I stammered, shaking at the sensation. He growled against my clit, the sound vibrating the sensitive nub and forcing a shaky moan from my lips. Lapping at my thighs and clit, he drove his tongue into my slit, curling it deep inside. I wailed, thighs shaking at the feel of the smooth muscle sweeping against the nerves inside. My hands fumbled for purchase on the ground as he pushed his muzzle between my thighs. A continuous growl poured from him, pulsing through me. I panted and whimpered under his ministrations.

Between his tongue plunging into my channel, then dragging over my clit, and the insistent growl, I quickly became a mewling, trembling, begging animal. Wound tight, I strained against him, pushing back even as he shoved forward, nearly knocking me flat again. His head turned slightly and teeth nipped my thigh. I jolted, the slight pain a delightful frisson of sensation.

“Please Beasty,” I begged, breathlessly. He snarled, tonguing my pussy again. His fingers slid between my legs and pinched my clit. I shattered, arching my back as I keened in pleasure. Gasping for air, I trembled under the continued assault of Beasty’s mouth and hands.

Beasty

Muscles seizing, she squealed her release into the leaves, shuddering under my hands. Her taste on my tongue was sweet and musky. I couldn’t get enough of it. Giving her pussy another long hard lick, I clutched her hips between my claws. My cock was extruded and painfully hard, eager to feel her heat. She bucked against me as I fondled her clit.

“Fuck me, Beasty! Please!” She pleaded helplessly. So many times, I’d imagined this moment. Fisting my dick, I rose over her and thrust into her, hard. She moaned at the rough intrusion, quivering and arching under me. I pulled out quickly, then eagerly thrust back in. My breath panted harshly in my chest and I growled excitedly.

Feeling her through Logan was a shadow of what I felt now. She was hot and wet, a silky squeeze on my cock as I pummeled into her core. My hips slapped against her ass in quick sharp jerks. She cried out her pleasure, fingers digging furrows in the dirt. Michelle's pussy clenched around me, making me want to spill right away. I tensed my muscles against the urge, determined to have her screaming her orgasm on my cock as I knotted her.

The both of us were beyond words now. I was a snarling, grunting beast. She squealed and moaned, crying wordless animal pleas for more. Her body bowed and moved with me, countering my thrusts, meeting me stroke for stroke. Leaning down, I bit her shoulder, a quick hard bite of ownership, claiming her as my own, branding her for others to see. Michelle shrieked in surprise and came, her sheath clamping down on me as her cry turned to a scream of ecstasy. I threw my head back in a howl of rapture as my own orgasm crashed over me. I ground against her, my dick jerking as I came, spurting my seed deep in her channel. The pressure swelled in my cock, the base knotting inside her and locking us together in shared bliss.

I collapsed over her, gasping as I buried my muzzle in her hair. She lay limply in the leaf litter, thoroughly fucked and still shivering with each flutter of her sweet little pussy. I braced my weight on my elbows while trying to catch my breath. My dick throbbed pleasantly. She shifted slightly, freezing at the tug of my knot in her body.

"Beasty?" She panted lightly.

"Mmm, yes pretty bird?"

"What is that?"

"What is what?" She was expecting me to be able to think? Didn't she know it didn't work that way? There was never enough blood flow in these situations. She shifted, tugging on my knot a little.

"That," she clarified.

"My knot. It will go down soon, just don't try to pull away yet. You feel so fucking good," I murmured into the side of her neck, licking the mark I'd left.

“We’ll discuss that when I can think again,” she sighed finally, shifting her knees so they slid out from under her. Carefully I followed her body down as she dragged me down by my cock. “God, that was amazing,” she laughed as I settled over her.

“Told you furry was good, especially after a proper chase,” I stated haughtily.

“Yes, yes you did,” she agreed, patting my hand. I laced my fingers with hers, still amazed at how tiny she was compared to me.

“You are ok? The baby?” I asked anxiously.

“We are better than ok,” she said firmly. A noise made my ears twitch. I popped up a little, pulling her hips up with an arm around her waist. She gasped at the sudden movement, then turned her head to look at me. “Beasty, what…”

I shoved Logan out into the open just as two construction workers walked into view.

Logan

Beasty retreated so quickly it left me dizzy and breathless. His exertions with Michelle translated to a healthy sweat on my skin that matched hers as well and we were still locked together by his cock knot, but at least I was human when the two men appeared between the trees.

“Oh shit,” one of them cursed upon seeing us.

“Um, some privacy for my fiancé and I, if you don’t mind?” I drawled as Michelle squeaked in embarrassment.

“Uh yeah, sorry, we just heard some…noises…” the man stammered in reply. He and his companion stumbled back towards the construction site and Michelle burst out laughing.

“I can just imagine them thinking of all those noises and trying to figure out how you made some of them,” she giggled.

“I am so going to pay the contractor extra to bring in a second crew and get the cabin finished faster,” I murmured, kissing the back of her

shoulder.

She chuckled again. Her laughter turned to a moan as the jostling pulled at the knot in her pussy. My breath hitched at the strange sensation, but I could feel the swollen flesh easing slowly until it was smaller but still hard enough to stroke in and out of her again.

Your turn, Beasty purred in my head.

Yes, it is, I agreed readily, spanning her waist with my hands. She gave a beautiful shivery moan as I started moving, her hips lifting to take me deeper.

I know the fairy tales usually ended at this point, but I felt like mine was just beginning…

Afterward

The nice thing about creative licensing is you can take something and tweak it just enough to suit your story. I decided early on that I wanted to use one of the black dog legends, also known as hellhounds, for Beasty's curse. The Question was, which one? Once I started my research, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that not only are there several versions of the legends in the United Kingdom, but also around the world.

Some of them referred to malevolent spirits that represent death, such as the Barghest and Moddey Dhoo; others were more benign, such as the Capelthwaite and the protective Church Grims. I chose to use the Tibicena, an evil mythological beast of the extinct Guanches culture from the Canary Islands.

The prehispanic inhabitants of the islands worshipped a father God by the name of Achaman and feared his malevolent counterpart Guayota, the God of Chaos. The Tibicena was the demon offspring of Guayota, said to have the bodies of great wild dogs with long, black fur and red eyes, living in mountain caves and tormenting the lost and disturbed. According to the legends, Guayota coveted the sun, Magec, and kidnapped it, shutting it up in the underworld, Teide, therefore plunging the world into darkness. Achaman battled Guayota, locking him in Teide instead and releasing Magec back into the sky.

As for the pyramid in this tale. There are pyramids in the Canary Islands. Called the Pyramids of Guimar, they are six, rectangular, pyramid shaped, terraced structures located in the district of Chacona on the island of Tenerife. There are also other less famous pyramids scattered about the island of Tenerife. It was once thought that the Guanches were responsible for the pyramids, but certain studies suggest that they may not be quite old enough and so the question goes unanswered.

The jungle pyramid and the Vault of Teide are my own constructs, as is the carved idol, and are in no way real locations. Most of my research was done through Wikipedia and articles from Ancient Origins.

As with any of my stories, thank you. Thank you for joining me on this journey, thank you for reading my book. I truly hope that you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it and as always, I would be ever so grateful if you left a review.

Happy reading, my lovely!

Charity Wells

About The Author

Charity Wells is a paranormal/sci-fi romance author. A voracious reader and lover of all genres of romance, she happily devours everything from Viking warriors to alien overlords. Her favorites though are reptilian or feline aliens, shapeshifters, and just about anything with wings and/or tails, especially prehensile. She likes strong, muscley males who can be total badasses for, and super sweeties with, their chosen mates. And biting, Charity really likes biting.

Charity spends her days working at her local airport, squeezing in as much writing as possible, and taking care of her four minions and the cranky old wolf she married. When she has spare time, she likes to bake novelty cakes, make candy, and every once in a while, do some kind of crafty little project or another.

You can follow Charity on Facebook at:

https://www.facebook.com/Charity-Wells-Author-247900392441679/

Also by Charity Wells

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A woman on the run. A werelion desperate to protect his pride. Each are drawn to the other in ways they never could have anticipated. They soon realize they may have a common enemy, a psychopath bent on destroying them both.

https://www.amazon.com/Lions-Prize-Shifter-Spirits-Novel-ebook/dp/B07CQ8HVYC

A Tiger's Price

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A Very Alien Christmas Tree

He's a single dad just trying to keep a promise to his little girl. She's a solitary alien with a garden to envy. There's a lonely Christmas just around the corner. Can he find a proper tree for his daughter in time for the holiday? Can she find room in her heart for the little family that invaded her sanctuary? How far will a simple promise take them?

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